

I Shall Seal the Heavens

(我欲封天)

Book 1

Patriarch Reliance

Er Gen

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Story Description:

Shall Seal the Heavens is currently one of the most popular xianxia stories in China. It is about a failed young scholar named Meng Hao who gets forcibly recruited into a Sect of Immortal Cultivators. In the Cultivation world, the strong prey on the weak, and the law of the jungle prevails. Meng Hao must adapt to survive. And yet, he never forgets the Confucian and Daoist ideals that he grew up studying. This, coupled with his stubborn nature, set him on the path of a true hero. What does it mean to “Seal the Heavens?” This is a secret that you will have to uncover along with Meng Hao!

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Scholar Meng Hao

The State of Zhao was a very small country. Like other small countries in the Nanshan Continent, its people admired the Lands of the Great Tang to the east, and they admired Chang'an. Not only did the king carry this admiration, but all scholars in the State of Zhao did. They could see it, almost as if they stood atop the Tower of Tang in the capital city, oh so far away.

This April was neither extremely cold, nor scorching hot. Light winds caressed the land, passing the Qiang Di clan in the northern desert, blowing over the lands of the Great Tang. Under the twilight sky, it lifted the fog-like dust, then swirling, twisting, reached Mt. Daqing in the State of Zhao. Then it fell onto a young man who sat there on the mountaintop.

He was a lean young man, holding a bottle gourd and wearing a clean blue scholar's robe. He appeared to be about sixteen or seventeen. He was not tall, and his skin was somewhat dark, but his bright eyes sparkled with intelligence. And yet, all his intelligence seemed to be hidden by the frown on his face. He seemed lost.

"Failed again..." He sighed. His name was Meng Hao, an average student from Yunjie County, which lay at the foot of the mountain. Years ago, his parents went missing, and did not leave much behind in the way of assets. Education was expensive, so he was almost completely broke.

"I've taken the Imperial exams three years in a row. In all that time, I read books written by famous wise men until I wanted to throw up. Maybe that isn't the path for me after all." Filled with self-deprecation, he looked down at the gourd bottle, his eyes bleak.

"My dream of becoming an official and getting rich just keeps getting farther and farther away. I might as well forget about trying to go to the Lands of the Tang... How useless to be a student." He laughed bitterly. Sitting there on the silent mountaintop, gazing at the bottle gourd in his hand, he looked increasingly lost. He began to feel fear. What would he do in the future? Where would he go?

Maybe a high-ranking official would take an interest in him, or a beautiful young maiden. Or would he continue to take the exams, year after year?

There were no answers to the questions. To a teenager his age, this feeling of being lost had devoured him like a giant invisible mouth. He truly felt afraid.

“Even the teachers in town can only make a few pieces of silver. That’s worse than Uncle Wang’s carpenter shop. If I’d realized that earlier, I could have learned some carpentry skills from him. That way, at least I wouldn’t be starving like I am now.” He grew silent for a while.

“I don’t have much food or money left at home. I owe Steward Zhou three pieces of silver. What am I going to do?” He raised his head and looked up at the sky, blue and grand. It was so large you could not see its ends. Much similar to how he could not see his future.

After a while, Meng Hao shook his head and took out a slip of paper from his robe. He read it carefully, placed it in the gourd bottle, then stood up and threw the gourd down the mountain.

At the bottom of the mountain was a wide river which never froze during the winter, and was said to flow all the way to the Lands of the Tang.

Meng Hao stood on top of the mountain, watching the gourd bottle drift further and further along down the river. He stared unblinking. For a moment, he seemed to have glimpsed his mother, and the happiness of his childhood. The gourd carried his dreams, his wishes, and his hopes for the future. Perhaps one day someone would pick up the gourd, open it, and read the note.

“Regardless of what I do, be it study or work, I will keep living.” This was his personality: intelligent and determined. If he wasn’t this way, he would not have been able to survive after his parents left.

He raised his head toward the sky, the look of determination in his eyes growing deeper. He was about to head down the mountain.

At that exact moment, he heard a weak voice coming from a nearby cliff. The sound seemed to be borne along by the wind. As it passed Meng Hao's ears, it was almost too faint to notice.

"Help... help..."

Meng Hao stopped for a moment, shocked, then listened carefully. As he concentrated, the sound of the voice calling for help grew stronger.

"Help..."

He walked a few steps forward until he had nearly reached the edge of the peak. When he peered over the edge, he saw a person, his body sticking out of a crevice halfway down the cliff. Pale face full of fear and desperation, he cried for help.

"You... are you Meng Hao? Help, Scholar Meng, help me." It was a teenager. As soon as he saw Meng Hao, he expressed surprise and happiness, having suddenly found hope in a desperate situation.

"Wang Youcai?" Meng Hao's eyes grew wide as he looked at the young man. He was the son of Uncle Wang, who owned the carpentry shop in town. "How did you end up here?"

Meng Hao looked at the crevice. The cliff itself was quite steep, and it seemed impossible to climb down. The slightest carelessness would send the climber falling into the river.

Considering how fast the river flowed, if you fell in, the chances of dying were about 90%.

"It's not just me, there are other people from nearby towns," Wang gushed. "We're all stuck here. Brother Meng, let's not chat, please, just help us get out." Perhaps he had been hanging out of the crack for too long. His hands grasped at the air, and if not for his compatriots, who grabbed him by the shirt, he would have slipped and fell down the cliff. His face turned pale with fear.

Meng Hao realized the danger. But he had climbed the mountain alone today, and had no rope. How could he save anyone? At that moment, he turned and realized that the mountainside was covered with rattan vines.

As frail as he was, it took him two hours to find a rattan vine that was long enough. Breathing heavily, he dragged the rattan to the cliff. Calling out Wang's name, he bent over and lowered the rattan down the cliff.

"You still haven't told me how you got down there," Meng Hao said as he lowered the vine.

"By flying!" It was not Wang who spoke the words, but another young man who stuck his body out of the crevice next to him. This boy looked feisty and intelligent, and spoke with a loud voice.

"Bullshit! You can fly?" mocked Meng Hao, pulling the rattan vine back up a bit. "If you can fly down here, then why don't you fly back up?"

"Don't listen to his nonsense," said Wang Youcai, clearly worried that Meng Hao wouldn't lower the rattan vine back down. "We were captured by some flying women. They said they were going to take us to some Sect to be servants."

"More bullshit?" said Meng Hao dismissively. "Only Immortals from legends can do that. Who believes in that?" In books he had read, there were stories of people who became rich after meeting Immortals, but it was all just lies.

Just as the rattan reached the crevice, Wang caught it. But then, Meng Hao suddenly felt a cold wind behind his back. From the temperature around him, it seemed winter had returned. He shivered. He slowly turned to look back, then screamed and stepped forward into emptiness, beginning to fall off the cliff.

He had seen a woman in a long silver robe and pale face, standing there staring at him. It was impossible to tell her age. She was extremely beautiful, but radiated a coldness that made one feel as if she had just crawled out of a grave.

"Sometimes when you find certain things with certain qualities, it's just fate."

When the voice hit his ears, it felt like bones rubbing together. This woman seemed to possess some sort of strange power, and when Meng

Hao looked into her eyes, his whole body felt ice cold, as if she could see through him. As if he could hide nothing from her.

Her words still floating through the air, she shook her wide sleeve, and suddenly, a gust of greenish wind picked up Meng Hao. He flew down the cliff with her. His mind went blank.

When they reached the crevice, the women lifted her hand and threw him inside. As for her, she stopped moving, as did the greenish wind. Wang and his three friends scurried backward in fright.

The woman stood there, not saying a word. She raised her head and glanced at the rattan vine.

Meng Hao was so nervous he had started shaking. He stood up, glancing around quickly. The crevice was not spacious, and was in fact quite narrow. Even with only a few people inside, there was not much room.

His eyes fell on Wang and the two other young men. One was the clever fellow; the other one was clean and pudgy. The two of them shivered, looking as if they might cry from fear at any moment.

“We were short one person,” said the pale-faced woman. Now she looked at Meng Hao instead of the rattan. “We’ll put you in with them.”

“Who are you?” asked Meng Hao, concealing his fear. He was an educated person and had a strong personality. Despite being afraid, he controlled himself and did not panic.

The woman said nothing. She raised her right hand and waved, and the green wind appeared again. It lifted up all the young men, and they flew out of the cave together with the woman, shooting up into the sky. They disappeared. Left behind was only Mt. Daqing. It stood there, straight and tall, merging in the darkness of twilight.

The blood drained from Meng Hao’s face. He saw himself within the green wind, crossing the sky. As he flew above the ground, wind blew into his mouth, making it impossible to breathe. A word appeared in his head.

“Immortals?” He held held his breath for the amount of time it would normally take to breathe ten times, until he couldn’t hold on any more.

Then he passed out.

When he opened his eyes, he found that they had landed on a platform paved with green stone, halfway up a mountain. More rolling mountains surrounded them. Clouds and fog drifted about; this was definitely not the mortal world. The beautiful peaks of the surrounding mountains looked very strange.

Wang and the other young men woke up, scared and shivering. They stared at the back of the woman.

Standing in front of her were two Cultivation monks wearing long green robes. They appeared to be in their twenties. They had sunken eyes with fear-inspiring green pupils.

“Excellent work, Elder Sister Xu,” said one of the men, his voice flattering. “You found four talented young babies.”

“Take them to the Servants’ Quarter,” said the woman, her face cold, not even looking at Meng Hao and the others. Suddenly, her entire body transformed. She became a rainbow and then disappeared into the mountains.

By this time, Meng Hao had recovered his composure. He stared, numb, at the place where the woman had disappeared. An expression appeared on his face which had not appeared there for sixteen years. His blood boiled.

“Servants?” he thought. “If the work is for immortals, the pay must be good.” Now that he knew the people didn’t want to kill them, he took a step forward.

“Sister Xu has reached the seventh level of Qi condensation,” lamented the second of the Cultivation monks. “The Imam bestowed a Wind Pennant upon her, which means even though she hasn’t developed the proper foundation, she can still fly.” He looked arrogantly down at Meng Hao and the others.

“You and you,” he said pointing at Wang and the clever young man. “Follow me to the Southern Servants’ Quarters.”

“What is this place?” Wang asked, his voice and body both shaking as the Immortal pointed at him.

“The Reliance Sect.”

Chapter 2: The Reliance Sect

The Reliance Sect, located within the borders of the State of Zhao, on the southern edge of the Nanshan continent, was once first among the Four Great Sects. Even though it was still famous in the southern regions, it had experienced a decline in recent years and did not maintain the glorious position it once had. Nowadays, compared the State of Zhao, it could only be considered inferior.

Actually, it hadn't always been called the Reliance Sect. But a thousand years ago, a Cultivation monk appeared who caused a great sensation in the southern regions. He'd called himself Founder Reliance, and had forced the Sect to change its name as such. He'd trod roughshod over all the other Sects in the State of Zhao, plundering their treasures, remaining unrivaled for some time.

But things were different now. Founder Reliance had been missing for nearly 400 years. If it were not for the fact that no one knew if he was alive or dead, the Sect would already have been swallowed up by some other Sect. It was past its glory days. Considering the lack of resources in the State of Zhao, and pressure from the other three Sects, if they wanted to get new recruits, they were forced to kidnap people to act as servants. There was no way they could open their doors to recruit openly.

Meng Hao followed the green-robed man along the small paths that wound among the mountain peaks. The surroundings were garden-like, with strange rocks and odd-looking trees everywhere. Amidst the beautiful scenery, extravagantly decorated buildings with jade roof tiles rose up out of the clouds and mist. Meng Hao sighed continuously. Sadly, the fat teenager next to him wailed the entire time, somewhat ruining the mood.

"I'm finished, really finished.... I want to go home," muttered the fat teenager, tears rolling down his face. "There's mantou waiting at home, and fish. Dammit, dammit. I want to inherit the family land, become a rich old man, and have a few concubines. I don't want to be a servant here."

He muttered under his breath for the time it takes to drink half a cup of

tea, until the green-robed man turned. "If you spout one more bit of nonsense," he said coldly, "I'll cut your tongue out."

The fat teenager suddenly trembled violently, his eyes shining with fear, but he shut his mouth.

When he saw this, Meng Hao began to reconsider how wonderful the situation might or might not be. But he had a persistent personality, so he took a deep breath and maintained his silence.

After a while, when they reached a point about half way up the mountain, Meng Hao saw a row of flat buildings emerging from the roiling fog.

Seven or eight young people wearing hemp robes sat outside the buildings. They looked exhausted. As Meng Hao and the others approached, the young people noticed them, but did not call out any greetings.

Some distance away, a young man wearing a light blue robe sat on a crag. His face was long, almost like a horse, and his robe was obviously more expensive and fancy than those worn by the other youths. Though his face was cold, when the green-robed man approached leading Meng Hao, the young man stood and greeted him with cupped fists.

"Greetings, Brother."

"These are two newly arrived servants," said the green-robed man impatiently. "Please arrange for their accommodations." With that, he turned and left, not even glancing at Meng Hao and the other young man.

After he left, the horse-faced young man sat down again, crossing his legs and coldly glancing over Meng Hao and the fat teenager.

"This is the Northern Servants' Quarter," he said in a cold, emotionless voice. "The Reliance Sect does not support slackers. Now that you're here, you will work for thirty years, upon which you can leave. If you try to escape, well, there are many wild beasts in these lonely mountains, and you will certainly die. Go retrieve your work uniform. From now on, you are isolated from the mortal world, and will work peacefully as a servant."

The fat teenager trembled even harder, his face filling with despair. Meng Hao remained calm. In fact, deep within his eyes was an indescribable sparkle. The horse-faced man noticed. He had held this position for many years and had seen many young people captured to be servants, but had never seen anyone as calm as Meng Hao.

“If you have a good temperament,” he said lightly, “you may not need to labor for the full thirty years. You can practice cultivation in your time off. If you manage to reach the first level of Qi condensation, then you will be promoted to the Outer Sect.” He flicked his wide sleeve, whereupon two hemp robes appeared in front of Meng Hao and the fat teenager. On the front of each robe was a wooden badge the size of a thumb, engraved with the character “Servant.”

In addition to the robe, there was also a small booklet, upon the cover of which was written three characters: “Qi Condensation Manual.”

As soon as Meng Hao laid eyes on the characters, he began to breathe hard. He stared at the booklet and recalled how when discussing the cold-faced woman, the green-robed man had mentioned the seventh level of Qi condensation.

“We can become Outer Sect disciples when we reach the first level, but that woman has already reached the seventh level... what is Qi condensation? Perhaps that is the way to become an Immortal, like they talk about in stories.”

If that was the pay he would receive from his work, well, it might not be money, but it would be worth hundreds of pieces of gold in the outside world. Meng Hao’s excitement rose. He grabbed the robe and used it to wrap up the badge and booklet.

“The East Seventh house is where you will live. Starting tomorrow, your job is to cut wood. Ten logs each, every day. You are not permitted to eat until your chopping is finished.” He closed his eyes.

Breathing deeply, Meng Hao imitated the young man and saluted with clasped fists, then walked toward the house, followed by the fat teenager. The building appeared to be a Siheyuan courtyard dwelling that had been

expanded multiple times. Following the signs, they located the seventh one, then opened the door and entered.

The room wasn't large. It contained a table and two small beds, and though simple, was quite neat and tidy. The fat teenager sat down on one of the beds, then, unable to hold it in anymore, began to cry.

He was about 12 or 13 years old, and he cried loudly. It surely echoed outside.

"My father is a Lord, and I'm supposed to be a Lord too. I'm not supposed to be a servant." He seemed extremely distraught, and his fat little body trembled.

"Stop crying," said Meng Hao, trying to comfort him. "Think about it. It's not that bad here. We're working for immortals. How many people would envy us if they knew?" He quickly closed the door.

"I don't want to work for other people," he replied. "My marriage has already been arranged and engagement gifts sent. My poor, beautiful lady hasn't even married me, yet is already a widow." The more he cried, the more heartbroken he grew.

A strange expression appeared on Meng Hao's face. This fat teenager was still young, he thought to himself. I can't believe he's been promised a wife, yet has never even felt the touch of a woman's hand. He sighed emotionally, thinking about how amazing it would be to be rich. This fat teenager's family is so rich that he never has to worry about food or clothing. And yet I have nothing. Even after selling my ancestral home last year, I still owe Steward Zhou a lot of money.

Thinking of the money he owed made him laugh. Now that he was here, Zhou could come to chase after him for the money if he was strong enough. If not, he would be dead by the time Meng Hao left.

The more he thought about this place, the better he felt about it. He didn't need to worry about money, or lodging or food. He even got payment worth hundreds of pieces of gold, and that was before he even started working. Considering that this was a dwelling-place of Immortals, it could truly be said that he had unexpectedly been rescued from a

desperate situation.

The fat teenager's crying had begun to annoy him. Ignoring him, he pulled the manual out from the hemp robe and started reading. After reading the first line of the first page, he felt shocked.

"A person should have something to rely on. If you are a mortal who desires riches and titles, if you are a monk who wants to live a life free from worry, join my Reliance Sect. You can rely on me." That was introduction to the manual, and it was signed by Founder Reliance.

Even though it was only a handful of words, they were filled with an indescribable power. It was both an invitation and a description of the Reliance Sect. Meng Hao felt numb, and then, everything suddenly made sense.

"The Reliance Sect. Is this the meaning of the Sect? People must find something to rely on; when they find the Reliance Sect, then they will be rich, powerful and free from worry." It made more and more sense. He realized that if he'd had an official to rely on, he would never have failed the examinations three times in a row. He sighed, his respect growing for Founder Reliance, whom he had never actually met. With that one sentence, it seemed as if a door in his life had suddenly opened.

"In other words, I have to find someone to rely on while I'm here. If I do, I won't have to worry about anything." His eyes grew brighter as he continued to scan the manual. Soon, he lost track of time, and didn't even notice the fat teenager crying next to him.

The fat teenager finally cried himself to sleep around midnight, whereupon his snores began to reverberate around the room like thunder. Meng Hao reluctantly closed the manual. Even though he felt very tired, his eyes were filled with vim and vigor.

"This book isn't worth 100 gold, it's worth 1,000!" he said to himself. For someone who had always dreamed of becoming a rich official, something worth 1,000 gold was worth more than anything except his life.

In his excitement, he noticed that the fat teenager's snoring had ceased. He looked over, and saw that the young man had sat up in bed and was

waving his arms around and muttering.

“I’m gonna beat you to death! How dare you steal my mantou! I’m gonna bite you to death! How dare you steal away my wife!” As he talked, he got off the bed, his eyes still closed, waving his fists angrily. Then, amazingly, he grabbed the table and bit the corner hard with his mouth, leaving a deep mark. Then he went back to sleep and began to snore.

Meng Hao watched him for a bit, just to confirm that he had been sleepwalking just now. Then he looked back to the bite mark, realizing that he should never provoke the fat teenager when he was asleep. He inched away from him, then looked down at the manual again, feeling excited.

“The ninth level of Qi condensation is the path to being an Immortal. Working for them, I have a chance to become an Immortal myself. That is the biggest payment possible. If I become an Immortal, I must have a chance to become rich.” Meng Hao gripped the manual, his eyes shining brightly. He had finally found another path besides studying for the exams.

At that moment, the door was kicked open with a bang, and a loud “harumph” sounded out.

Chapter 3: Promotion to the Outer Sect

“You went to sleep early. Now it’s time to wake up for Grandpa Tiger!” The door shook as it opened, and a tall, strong man entered wearing servants’ robes. He glared fiercely at Meng Hao and the fat teenager.

“Starting today,” he said angrily, “you two little bastards will chop ten trees per day for me, each. Otherwise, Grandpa Tiger will flay you alive.”

“Grandpa Tiger,” said Meng Hao, scrambling off the bed and standing there nervously. “You’re standing right in front of me, quiet down a...” Before he could finish speaking, the large man fixed his eyes on him.

“Quiet farts! You think I’m speaking too loud?”

Looking at his fierce bearing and large stature, Meng Hao hesitated, then said, “But... the Brother in charge of servants already assigned us to chop down ten trees per day.”

“Then chop an extra ten for me,” he said with a cold harumph.

Though Meng Hao said nothing, his brain spun. He had just arrived in the Immortal’s Sect, and was already being bullied. He didn’t want to give in, but the man was so big and strong, and he himself was clearly too weak, unable to fight back. Then he glanced at the table, and noticed the bite marks. Thinking back to how strong the fat teenager had been in the clutches of his dream walking, he had a flash of inspiration. He suddenly yelled at the sleeping fat teenager.

“Fatty! Someone’s stealing your mantou and your girl!”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the fat teenager sat up, eyes closed, shouting, his face twisted with furious savagery.

“Who’s stealing my mantou? Who’s stealing my wife?” he cried, leaping out of the bed. “I’ll beat you to death! I’ll bite you to death!” He began striking randomly around the room. The big man stared in shock, then took a step forward and made to slap the boy.

“You dare to shout in front of Grandpa Tiger!” His slap landed on the boy’s face, but then the big man cried out. The fat teenager, eyes closed,

had bitten down onto the man's arm. No matter how the man shook his arm, the boy refused to let go.

"Stop biting me, dammit. Stop biting." This man was a servant, not a Cultivation monk. He had been a servant for a long time, and his body was strong, but the pain had caused him to break out in a cold sweat. He punched and kicked, but couldn't make the fat teenager loosen his jaw even the slightest bit. The harder he hit, the deeper the boy bit. The man's flesh was mangled, and it seemed as if a chunk were about to be ripped off.

His screams drifted outside, such that others began to notice. A cold voice shouted out.

"What's the ruckus?"

It was the voice of the horse-faced young man. As soon as the big man heard it, he began to tremble in fear. Despite the horrible pain which twisted his face, he ceased his screaming.

"It's not a good idea to upset the Brother in charge of servants," said the big man hurriedly. "There's no benefit to continuing this. Quick, stop biting me! I don't need the ten logs."

Meng Hao never imagined the fat teenager's dream state would be so intense, and also wanted to stop the situation. He walked forward and lightly slapped the fat teenager, then whispered into his ear.

"The mantou is back, and so is your girl."

The young man suddenly relaxed and released his jaw. Continuing to punch the air, he returned to his bed, his face covered in blood, then fell back to sleep.

Giving another nervous glance toward the fat teenager, the big man left without saying another word.

Meng Hao stood there for a while gaping, admiring the fat teenager, then returned to bed with the greatest of care and went back to sleep.

The following morning at dawn.

As the morning sun filled the sky, the sound of bells filled the air. It seemed to carry with it a strange power; as people heard it, they woke and began their work. The fat teenager woke up. He looked down dumbly at the marks on his body. He touched his face.

“What happened last night? How come my whole body hurts? Did someone beat me up?”

Meng Hao dressed silently for a while before speaking.

“Nothing happened. Everything seemed normal.”

“How come my face feels swollen?”

“Maybe it’s mosquitos.”

“Then how come my mouth has blood on it?”

“You fell out of bed last night. Several times, in fact.” Meng Hao opened the door and stepped out, then stopped and looked back. “Look, fatty,” he said in a serious tone, “you need to grind your teeth more often, sharpen them up.”

“Oh? My dad used to say the same thing,” he said in surprise, gingerly putting on his robes.

Meng Hao and the fat teenager walked out into the sunlight and began their life as servants in the Reliance Sect, chopping down trees.

Each of them was responsible for ten trees. Around the Northern Servants’ Quarter, the wild slopes were covered with trees. Although the trees were not big, they were very dense and spread like an ocean as far as the eye could see.

Carrying his servant’s axe, Meng Hao rubbed at his shoulder. His arm felt both numb and painful. The axe was heavy. Off to the side, the fat teenager panted as they climbed. Eventually, they found a suitable area, and the sound of chopping axes gradually rang out as they began to work.

“My dad is super rich,” said the fat teenager with a long face. He raised his axe. “I’m gonna be super rich too. I don’t want to be a servant... These Immortals are strange, and they have magic. What do they need fire for?”

And why do they need us to chop down trees for them?”

Unlike the garrulous fat teenager, Meng Hao was too tired to speak. Sweat showered off of him like rain. Because of his poverty in Yunjie Village, he hadn't been able to eat much meat and as such his body was weak. He didn't have much energy. After the space of time it takes half an incense stick to burn, he leaned up against a tree, breathing heavily.

He looked at the fat teenager, who, though he was so tired he trembled, he continued to curse under his breath and chop at the tree. He was younger than Meng Hao, but a lot stronger.

Meng Hao shook his head bitterly and continued to rest. He pulled out the Qi Condensation Manual and examined it again. Following the description in the manual, he attempted to sense the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth.

Time passed, and soon it was dusk. In his day of work, Meng Hao had managed to cut down two trees. The fat teenager had managed to cut down eight. By pooling them together, it was enough for one of them to eat. They consulted for a bit, and then the fat teenager went to get some food which the two of them shared in their room. Then they fell to sleep, exhausted.

Eventually, the fat teenager's snores filled the room, and Meng Hao struggled to sit up, his eyes filled with determination. Ignoring his hunger and exhaustion, he picked up the Qi Condensation Manual and started reading it again.

“When I used to study for the examinations, I would usually stay up reading until dawn. I'm used to being hungry. As for my life now, it may be tiring, but at least I have a goal. I can't believe that after failing in the Imperial examinations, I will fail in Cultivation.” Stubborn persistence shone in his eyes. He lowered his head and began to study.

He continued on until late in the night, until he finally fell asleep, although when exactly that was, he didn't know. As he slept, his dreams were filled with thoughts of sensing the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth. The bells woke him up in the morning. He opened his bloodshot

eyes, yawned, and got out of bed. Then, along with the energetic fat teenager, went back to chopping wood.

A day, two day, three days... time continued on until two months had passed. Meng Hao's wood-felling ability slowly grew until he could chop down four trees in a day. But, most of his time was spent trying to grasp the meaning of spiritual energy. His eyes grew more and more bloodshot. Then one evening around dusk, as he sat panting in mediation, his body suddenly vibrated, and he felt a prickling numbness in his limbs. Then, it seemed as if tiny wisp of invisible Qi condensed within his flesh and blood, then seeped out of his body.

After that, he felt a strand of spiritual energy appear inside him. It disappeared almost instantly, but Meng Hao opened his eyes excitedly. His exhaustion disappeared, and his bloodshot eyes grew whiter. His body trembling, he clutched at the Qi Condensation Manual. He hadn't eaten or slept much in the past months. Other than chopping down trees, he spent almost all his time on spiritual energy, and now, at long last, he had some results. He felt as if he were filled with power.

Time passed in a flash, two months, and now it was the eighth month of the year, summer. Broiling sunlight fell from the sky.

"Condense the Qi into the body, fuse and disperse it, open the blood vessels and Qi passages, resonate with Heaven and Earth." It was noontime in the deep mountains near the Reliance Sect. Meng Hao used one hand to stoke the bonfire in front of him, and the other to hold the Qi Condensation Manual, which he studied intently.

He closed his eyes for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, sensing the delicate strand of Qi within his body. This was the Qi which had appeared two months ago, and Meng Hao regarded it as a treasure. The strand was clearly much thicker now. Using the mnemonics and circulation technique described in the manual, he sat in meditation, allowing the Qi strand to move about his body.

After a short time, Meng Hao opened his eyes and caught sight of the fat teenager approaching quickly, carrying his axe.

“Well, how is it?” panted the fat teenager as he ran up. Though fat, his body was strong.

“I still can’t disseminate it throughout my entire body,” said Meng Hao with a laugh. “But I’m quite confident that within a month, I’ll be able to reach the first stage of Qi condensation.” Belief filled his demeanor.

“What I meant was, how is the chicken?” He licked his lips as he looked at the bonfire.

“Oh, pretty much done,” said Meng Hao, also licking his lips and pulling back the branch he’d been using to stoke the fire. The fat teenager used his axe to dig through the soil and pull the chicken out. It was fully cooked now.

A fragrant aroma filled the air. They split the chicken in half and began to wolf it down.

“Ever since you were able to get some spiritual energy,” said the fat teenager, his lips covered in grease, “you’ve been able to catch wild chickens. Compared to now, the first two months here were like a nightmare...” This was his new practice, to flatter Meng Hao.

“A lot of people get food out in the wild, you just don’t know about it, that’s all.” As Meng Hao spoke, he took a bite out of a chicken leg, making his speech a bit garbled.

“Ai, if you really reach the first level of Qi condensation next week and become an Outer Sect disciple,” said the fat teenager, his face bitter, “then what will I do? I don’t understand any of those mnemonics.” He looked at Meng Hao expectantly.

“Look fatty, the only way you can get home is if you become an Outer Sect disciple,” said Meng Hao, dropping the chicken leg and looking him in the eye.

The fat teenager sat quietly for a while before giving a determined nod.

Six days flew by. It was night. The fat teenager was already asleep, and Meng Hao sat cross-legged in his room, meditating. He thought about how other than wood-chopping, he had spent all his time these past three

months in sensing spiritual energy. He thought back to two months ago, when the strand of Qi had first stirred within him. He breathed deeply, closing his eyes and causing the strand of spiritual energy to circulate throughout his body. Then, a loud sound reverberated in his head. Up to now, he had been unable to disperse the Qi throughout his entire body. But just now, he had succeeded, diffusing the Qi to every corner of his body. He felt as if his body were floating.

At the same moment in which Meng Hao achieved the first level of Qi condensation, the horse-faced young man sitting on the big stone outside slowly opened his eyes. He looked in the direction of Meng Hao's house, then closed his eyes again.

At dawn, under the envious eyes of everyone in the Northern Servants' quarter, Meng Hao walked out of the room that had been his home for the past four months. He stood in front of the horse-faced youth.

The fat teenager didn't come with him. He remained in the doorway watching Meng Hao, determination filling his eyes.

"You reached the first level of Qi condensation in four months. You're not quite outstanding, but not stupid, either." The horse-faced young man looked at him, his expression no longer cold. Calmly, he said, "Now that you are going to the Outer Sect, I must explain to you the rules there. Every month, Spirit Stones and medicinal pills will be distributed there, but it is not prohibited to take things by force from others, or to gang up. There is a Public Area there that some people call the Killing Zone. You ... you will need to look out for yourself." As he finished speaking, he lifted his right hand, whereupon a jade slip shot out and hovered in front of Meng Hao. He grabbed it.

"Imbue spiritual energy into that jade slip and it will lead you to the Treasure Pavilion in the Outer Sect. That is where you will register your promotion." The horse-faced young man closed his eyes.

Meng Hao said nothing. Clasp ing his fist in salute, he turned and glanced at the fat teenager. They looked at each other for a moment, and Meng Hao felt emotion welling up in his heart. He chose not to dwell on

it. He pinched the jade slip, which then began to glow with a green light, and gradually floated forward.

Meng Hao followed it, slowly leaving the Servants' Quarter.

He trod a narrow road which led away from the main gate, walking further and further away, toward the foot of the mountain. Eventually he reached an area he had never stepped foot into during the past four months.

The Reliance Sect was comprised of four main mountains, with east, west, north and south peaks, respectively. Surrounding them were vast mountain chains which seemed to never end. At the halfway point up each mountain was a Servants' Quarter. Meng Hao had been assigned to the Northern Servant's quarter on the Northern Mountain. The way further up was protected by defensive spells. Beyond them lived the Inner Sect disciples and elders.

Each of the four mountains was like this. As for the flat area in-between them all, it was filled with countless houses inhabited by the Reliance Sect's Outer Sect.

In this respect, the Reliance Sect is slightly different than other Sects. The Outer Sect is located at the foot of the mountain, whereas the servants live halfway up. This was a sect rule created for unknown reasons by Founder Reliant.

From a distance, the entire area seemed to be filled with roiling fog. However, upon stepping foot into the fog, it disappeared. In front of him stretched a scene of carved balustrades and marble steps, of lofty buildings and roads paved with green stone. Outer Sect disciples bustled about wearing green robes. A few of them noticed Meng Hao as he walked past.

Some of them shot him contemptuous glances which lacked even the slightest bit of good intent. He felt as if he were being stared at by wild beasts, which caused him to recall what Brother Horse-face had said about the Outer Sect.

Not long after that, he reached a black building in the southern section of the Outer Sect. It was three stories tall, and despite being black,

appeared to have been carved from jade, and almost seemed to be transparent.

As Meng Hao approached, the building's main door opened noiselessly and out walked a wizened, middle-aged man. He wore a long robe of deep green, and a shrewd expression covered his face. He lifted his right hand in a grabbing motion, and the jade slip flew into his hand. He looked at it then began to speak languidly:

"Meng Hao has been promoted to the Outer Sect. He shall be bestowed with a house, a green robe, a spirit tablet, and a bag of holding. The spirit tablet can be used to enter the Treasure Pavilion to retrieve a magic item." He waved his right hand, and a gray bag appeared in Meng Hao's hands.

He looked at the gray bag for a moment, then thought back to one of the Outer Sect disciples he'd passed on the road. That man had a bag just like this hanging at his waist.

The shrewd-looking man looked at Meng Hao, and could instantly tell that he was not familiar at all with the ways of the Outer Sect. Otherwise, how could he be unfamiliar with a bag of holding? Feeling a bit bad for him, he coolly said, "By imbuing the bag with spiritual energy, you can pack many things into it."

Having heard this, Meng Hao imbued the bag with a sizable amount of spiritual energy. It grew blurry, and then he caught a glimpse of a space inside about half the size of a person. There, he could see a green robe, a jade slip, and some other objects.

At this point, his interest was quite piqued. This bag of holding must be worth at least a hundred gold. It clearly was the product of Immortal hands.

He concentrated, and the jade slip suddenly appeared in his hand. He focused his attention even more and found that inside the bag was a map of the Outer Sect Quarter. In a remote corner was his house.

"Go look at it later," said the shrewd-looking man coldly. "The Treasure Pavilion is open and you haven't entered it yet."

Meng Hao lifted his head and stuffed the bag of holding into his robe. Looking at the opened door of the Treasure Pavilion, he sucked in a deep breath and stepped in, filled with anticipation.

As soon as he entered, his expression changed, and he sucked in a breath.

Chapter 4: A Copper Mirror

The Treasure Pavilion was indeed filled with treasure. Upon entering it, one's eye would be dazzled with brilliant lights. Neatly arranged jade shelves were filled with a dazzling display of bottles, swords, ornaments and jewelry. Meng Hao began breathing heavily, and his heart started pumping. It felt as if all the blood in his body had rushed to his brain. He stood there, dumbfounded.

In Meng Hao's short life, he had never seen so much wealth. He felt as if it had submerged him. His brain spun, and he inadvertently thought about grabbing all of it and running away.

"The value of these treasures..." murmured Meng Hao, "... they're priceless. The compensation for working for Immortals, it's incredible." He walked past one of the jade shelves, his expression filled with excitement, unconsciously stretching his head forward. He wondered if the third floor of the Treasure Pavilion was the same as the first, or if it perhaps had even more valuable treasures.

"Immortals... they're so rich!" Meng Hao heaved a deep sigh. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon something strange. On one of the jade shelves he noticed a copper mirror.

There were traces of corrosion on it. It didn't seem very special, nor did it glitter. It didn't seem like it could compare in any way to the treasures around it.

Surprised, Meng Hao picked it up and looked at it closely. It seemed quite ordinary, like something from the mortal world. Nothing about it seemed the least bit unique. And yet, here it was in the Treasure Pavilion, so he assumed it must have some value.

"Junior Brother truly has insight," said a voice from behind him. He didn't know when the shrewd-looking man had entered, but he stood there looking at the copper mirror. His voice filled with praise, he continued, "The fact that you picked up that copper mirror shows that you were destined to do so. There are many legends regarding it. The strangest thing

is, only those with good fortune and accumulated good deeds in past lives can acquire it. It seems Junior Brother is just such a person. With this mirror, you can lord it over heaven and earth. You definitely have this opportunity.” As the man spoke, he sighed over and over. His voice seemed to contain some strange power which forced Meng Hao to listen to him.

“This mirror...” Meng Hao looked down at it again, a strange expression on his face. It was not covered with complicated carvings, but instead, corrosion, making it very unclear.

“Junior Brother, don’t look at the mirror’s blurriness. You should know that true treasures of a spiritual nature often conceal themselves in ordinary things. The more humble they appear, the more precious they are.” Meng Hao was about to put the copper mirror back onto the shelf when the shrewd-looking man took several hasty steps forward to prevent him. He looked seriously at Meng Hao.

“Junior Brother, the fact that you picked up this object shows that you were destined to do so. Will you really put it back just because it looks ordinary? I have been responsible for the Treasure Pavilion for many years, and I know the origin of all the items here. Many years ago, this copper mirror caused a huge commotion in the State of Zhao. It was created from a ray of light which fell from the Heavens. After acquiring it, Founder Reliance studied it in secret, believing it to be a treasure of Heaven. In the end, he couldn’t unlock its mysteries, and came to the conclusion that it was predestined to fall into the hands of someone who would use it to trample upon heaven and earth.”

It startled Meng Hao to hear the name of Founder Reliance. He had just entered the Outer Sect, and there were many things he wasn’t familiar with. He began to hesitate.

“Founder Reliance studied it, but couldn’t understand it. I...”

“Your words are incorrect, Junior Brother. Allow Elder brother to explain: Founder Reliance’s lack of success in his studies proves that there is something unique and unusual about this treasure. Before you, ten or

more people took it to study it, and though none of them succeeded in understanding it, none of them regretted their decision.

“What if... what if you are the person destined to possess the mirror? In any case, if you take it, you can rest at ease. Of your fellow disciples who took the mirror in the past, most came back within three months, and I let them exchange it for something else. After dealing with me for some time, you will find that I am very easy-going. I don’t want to give fellow disciples a hard time.

“If you take it, but are unable to unlock its mysteries, then you can return it at any time and exchange it for something else. But if you abandon it, and it turns out you were destined to take it, then you will regret it for your entire life.” The shrewd-looking man stared intently at Meng Hao. When he saw Meng Hao hesitating, he laughed to himself. The new disciples were always the easiest to toy with. All he had to do was tell them the story of the mirror’s legend, and the grand words would seduce them. Their hearts would begin to boil.

“But...” Meng had studied and read from childhood, so he was quite intelligent. From the shrewd-looking man’s seemingly earnest expression, he could conjecture that the mirror was not exactly as had been described. But, the man stood there in front of him, clearly determined to prevent him from putting back the mirror. Even dropping it to the ground would be of little use. He began to regret picking it up in the first place.

“Junior Brother,” he said, his face stern, his voice low, “don’t violate the rules on your first day. When you pick something up in the Treasure Pavilion, you are not permitted to put it down.” The shrewd-looking man felt that enough was enough. This was his usual method to get people to take the mirror. He waved his wide sleeve, and a whistling wind picked up Meng Hao, flew him out of the Treasure Pavilion, and deposited him outside.

There was a crashing sound as the main door of the Treasure Pavilion slammed shut.

The voice of the shrew-looking man echoed from inside: “I’m soft-

hearted when it comes to fellow disciples. If you truly are not destined to have the mirror, then you can return it in a few days.”

Frowning angrily, Meng Hao looked up at the closed door. Then he sighed and looked back down at the copper mirror in his hands. He thought back to the words in the first chapter of the Qi Condensation Manual and hesitated. If this truly was something that Founder Reliance had studied, then it must have some value. Shaking his head, he put the mirror into his robe. Then, with a final hateful glare at the Treasure Pavilion, he turned and left.

He walked along the green paths of the Outer Sect, using the information from the jade slip as a guide. Around noontime, he found his house. It was along the north border, in a very remote section of the Outer Sect. Several other houses crowded around it.

He pushed the door open, and it slammed against the wall. Inside were a bed and a desk. Meng Hao stood there, feeling quite content. This place was much better than his room in the Servants' Quarter.

He sat down cross-legged on the bed, took a deep breath and pulled the copper mirror out of his robe. He studied it carefully, until the sun began to set over the western mountains. He lit an oil lamp and continued to study it, all to no avail. He had no idea what the purpose of the mirror could be.

No matter how he looked at it, the copper mirror seemed completely ordinary in nature.

When the night grew deep, Meng Hao put the mirror to the side and looked out the window at the moon. He thought about the fat teenager and his snoring. He missed it a little bit.

The bright moon shone outside, its rays touching the eaves of his window. Everything was silent, save for the sound of the wind among the leaves of the trees. Meng Hao took a deep breath, thinking about the moon. He felt emotional, as if he had entered a new age.

He murmured to himself: “I will never again be a scholar in Yunjie village. I’ve become a Reliance Outer Sect disciple...”

Meng Hao gathered his thoughts, closed his eyes, and sat in meditation, circulating the thread of spiritual energy in his body. He had been living in this fashion for months now, and was used to it.

One difference between the Outer Sect and the Servants' Quarter was that here, no one prepared food for you. You had to take care of your own food needs. If you didn't, you would starve to death and no one would care a whit. Although, in all the years, no one in the Reliance Outer Sect had ever starved to death.

Upon reaching the first stage of Qi condensation, one could absorb and emit the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth. Though that could not alleviate hunger, it could sustain your life.

Several days passed. One afternoon, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in meditation, when he suddenly heard a miserable scream from outside. He immediately opened his eyes, moved to the window and looked outside. He saw an Outer Sect disciple on the ground, being stamped upon over and over again by another. Blood oozed from a wound in his chest, but he wasn't dead, just wounded. The person who had been kicking him grabbed his bag of holding, then walked off with a cold harrumph.

The trampled disciple struggled to his feet, his eyes filled with violent ruthlessness. He staggered away. Surrounding onlookers stared at him coldly, their faces filled with ridicule.

Meng Hao observed silently. He had watched similar scenes played out countless times in the past few days, and as such had a deeper understanding of the ways of the Outer Sect.

Time blurred as seven days passed. During that time, Meng Hao saw even more instances of disciples being robbed. The fighting and plundering which occurred between Outer Sect disciples caused Meng Hao to grow more and more taciturn. Especially disturbing was when he had seen a disciple of the second or third level of Qi condensation killed by another in the Public Area. This caused Meng Hao to be especially careful and cautious when he went outside.

Thankfully, his cultivation foundation was low, and he didn't have

anything of value, so others mostly ignored him.

Actually, Meng Hao had reached a standstill in his spiritual cultivation. The second level of Qi condensation was different than the first. He still needed spiritual energy, but according to the Qi Condensation Manual, his mortal body had already begun to change. As such, reaching the second level of Qi condensation would require many more times the amount of spiritual energy than the first level did.

Similarly, Meng Hao now understood what latent talent was. The body's ability to absorb the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth was just that, latent talent. The more latent talent someone has, the more energy they could absorb. The less latent talent one has, the less energy they could absorb. For someone with considerable latent talent, the more time they spent on Tu Na breathing exercises, the more spiritual energy they could absorb.

According to his calculations, to reach the second level of Qi condensation would probably take at least one or two years. The amount of time required to reach the third level would be many more times than that.

Of course, if he acquired some medicinal pills or Spirit Stones, he could use them to amplify spiritual energy, then, he could decrease that time. That was why so much horrific robbery occurred in the Outer Sect; every month, pills would be openly distributed.

"The strong become stronger, the weak become weaker," said Meng Hao quietly. "This is how the Reliance Sect cultivates disciples for the Inner Sect."

One early morning, when the sky had just begun to grow dim with light, Meng Hao sat in meditation as usual. He had no special resources, except for his determination. Therefore, he did not give up on his nightly meditations and Tu Na breathing exercises. Bells reverberated throughout the Sect, and Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes.

"These bells..." Meng Hao's eyes focused, as if he had come to a realization. An excited expression appeared on his face, and he dashed out

of the room to see fellow disciples everywhere, rushing off into the distance.

“When these bells sound, the time has come for distribution of Spirit Stones and medicinal pills. It must be today.” More and more people began running in the direction of the bells. It seemed everyone within the Outer Sect was there.

“Pill Distribution Day,” said Meng Hao, breathing heavily. He ran along with the crowds until he reached the square in the center of the Outer Sect. The square was monumental in size, and along its borders were nine stone pillars covered in carvings of dragons. Placed on the foremost pillar was a platform over thirty meters in diameter, over which swirled a multi-colored cloud. Inside the cloud could be seen shapeless forms.

Over a hundred Outer Sect disciples stood there in their green robes, murmuring amongst themselves and glancing frequently at the multi-colored cloud.

Then, the cloud slowly dissipated, revealing a pock-faced old man wearing a golden robe. His face was placid and emitted a calm, natural power and dignity. His eyes shone like lightning. Two people stood next to him, a man and a woman, both wearing silver robes. The man was exceedingly handsome, with an upright appearance, although indifference covered his face. As for the woman, as soon as Meng Hao laid eyes on her, his pupils constricted.

This woman was the woman who had taken him from Daqing Mountain three months ago.

Chapter 5: This Kid isn't Bad

"It turns out Master Uncle Shangguan is distributing the pills himself, along with Inner Sect disciples Elder Sister Xu and Brother Chen. They all came. You don't see this very often. Don't tell me there's an Individual Pill Distribution this time?"

"It must be. Look, Brother Han Zong is here. He's the second-ranked disciple in the Outer Sect. His cultivation foundation has reached the fifth level of Qi condensation. If he can reach the seventh level, then he will automatically become an Inner Sect disciple. Too bad Brother Wang Tengfei isn't here."

"Considering Brother Wang Tengfei's abilities, he wouldn't care a whit about medicinal pills. The year he joined the Sect, he caused a big sensation amongst the Sect Elders. He probably doesn't want to violate Sect etiquette, so he'll rely only on himself to enter the Inner Sect. Then there will finally be a third Inner Sect disciple."

"Heh heh, this is gonna be fun. This is gonna be fun. With Individual Pill Distribution, there's a twenty-four hour period of Sealing in which the pill can't be used. Every two hours, the pill glows brightly. Anyone who wants to fight for it will be able to determine its location. Even if you grab the pill and run, you won't be able to keep it hidden for twenty-four hours."

Meng Hao listened to the discussions around him. Even though it was his first time taking part in this sort of thing, he knew whenever pills were distributed, there was a lot of fighting. In his half a month here, he had seen plenty of fights and even some deaths.

If today was really an Individual Pill Distribution day, then the fighting would be even more intense.

Meng Hao remained silent. Considering he was at the first level of Qi condensation, there was no way he would end up with the pill. Just looking at the greedy faces around him gave him a deeper understanding of the expression "the law of the jungle."

"Quiet!" said the old man in the gold robe. His voice was cold as he stood

on the platform, and though he didn't speak loudly, his voice reverberated like a booming thunderclap. The Cultivation monks standing below him were shocked to the core. Their ears hummed. Meng Hao was the most shocked of all, and it took him some time to recover.

"I am Cultivator Shangguan. Today, everyone in attendance will receive one Spirit Condensation pill, and half a Spirit Stone." Cultivator Shangguan flicked his right arm, and immediately, hundreds of medicinal pills and Spirit Stones flew about in all directions. They landed perfectly in front of everyone present. Meng Hao gazed at the medicinal pill and Spirit Stone floating in front of him. A fragrant, intoxicating aroma washed over him. This was his first time ever seeing a medicinal pill or a Spirit Stone.

The Spirit Stone was about the size of his fingernail, sparkling and almost translucent. Just looking at it could mystify a person.

His heart began to beat rapidly. These two items must be worth thousands of pieces of gold. Without any hesitation, Meng Hao reached out and grabbed the pill. He was about to pop it into his mouth and swallow it down when he noticed that no one around him was doing any such thing. His heart lurched. He looked down at the pill in his hand and noticed that it had a faint glow to it, and was sealed with a strange mark.

As Meng Hao stared at the pill in his hand, Cultivator Shangguan's voice once again rang out from the platform: "There is also a ... Dry Spirit Pill." A purple-colored medicinal pill appeared in his hand.

As soon as it appeared, a wonderful fragrance filled the entire square. Even just breathing it, Meng Hao felt as if his spiritual energy had increased a bit. This was clearly no ordinary pill.

"That's... a Dry Spirit Pill!"

"That's ... that's something incredibly precious to anyone under the fifth level of Qi condensation. There can't be many within the Sect, and yet, there it is!"

"When that pill is distributed, the fighting here in the Outer Sect will be fierce. Who knows how many people will die?" The crowd buzzed as they stared up at the glowing pill held by Cultivator Shangguan, their faces

filled with greed and desire. This was especially true of disciples who were on the brink of breaking through to a new level of cultivation. They fairly panted.

“Originally, the Dry Spirit Pill was not to be distributed today. However, I heard there was a disciple promoted to the Outer Sect this month, which makes me very happy. If we can do this every month, then brilliant glory lies just around the corner for the Reliance Sect. I bestow this pill upon that person as an encouragement.” Cultivator Shangguan smiled, and his glittering eyes swept across the crowd to fall upon Meng Hao.

Meng Hao’s heart began to race. The first half of the short speech had left him feeling unsettled, but he had no time to react; Cultivator Shangguan’s right hand flicked, and the purple pill appeared in front of him. Before he could even make an attempt to refuse, the pill lowered into his hand.

As of that moment, Meng Hao’s entrance into the Reliance Sect could be called unprecedented. The eyes of the entire crowd focused on him.

Greed and cruelty filled their expressions, as if they planned to rip him to pieces alive. Even the man and woman standing next to Cultivator Shangguan were staring. The woman had a look of shock on her face, which she quickly covered up with an icy expression.

“Haha, so a first level Qi condensation disciple receives the pill. There will be a lot of fighting this time. This guy is going to be public enemy number one.”

“He’s finished. Last time there was an Individual Pill Day, the guy who received the pill was at the second level of Qi condensation. He hesitated for just a moment too long, so Brother Zhao Wugang dragged him in a fury to the Public Area and lopped off his head.”

The sound of discussion reverberated across the square, and many disciples of the second or third Qi condensation level, despite knowing the danger, grew greedy. Because the cultivation foundation of the person who received the pill was so weak, they felt as if they were qualified to snatch it.

Meng Hao's entire body broke out in cold sweat. He wanted to throw the pill away, but he found that it actually stuck to his hand, making it impossible to get rid of. Around him, covetous eyes stared at him menacingly, and suddenly, it was as if he could feel the shadow of death hanging over him. Some people began to slowly walk toward him, murderous expressions filling their faces.

"Brother, why don't you toss that pill to me? If you don't, I'll give you a thrashing."

"If you don't give it to me, next year today will be the anniversary of your death."

The murmurs blasted at him like a cold wind from all directions.

At that moment, two old men sat cross-legged on one of the nearby mountain peaks, smiling as they discussed the scene unfolding in the Outer Sect Square.

"Master Shangguan really doesn't pay attention to things. To give the medicinal pill to a pup like that who just entered the Sect... He's finished. It seems our Reliance Sect will be short another disciple."

"The fighting this time isn't going to be interesting at all. I bet that as soon as the restrictive fog dissipates from the square, the pup will toss the pill."

As soon as the second old man finished speaking, the nine colorful, dragon-carved statues surrounding the square began to fade in color. From the look of it, after the space of about ten breaths, they would be completely colorless. At that point, the restrictive fog would also disappear.

Meng Hao's heart began to pound. He didn't need anyone to explain to him what would happen when the glowing pillars grew dark. The square would become a scene of madness. Even if he threw the pill away, that in and of itself would make some of the people angry at him.

"How... how could this be given to me?" said Meng Hao, sweating. His mind began to spin. If he didn't get rid of the pill, he would die; if he did

throw it away, he would become an object of hatred. Trying to make use of all the knowledge he had acquired in his three years of studying, he looked at the fading, colorful glow, and then at Cultivator Shangguan, who stood amidst the colorful fog on the platform, preparing to leave. At this critical moment, Meng Hao suddenly had a flash of inspiration.

He took a step forward and called out, "Disciple has something to say."

"Being able to come to the Reliance Sect and experience the wonders of living amidst Immortals has been a wonderful stroke of luck. Disciple would very much like to offer thanks to the one person who made this possible.

"Disciple has been waiting day and night for another opportunity to lay eyes on her, to offer thanks in person. Today, I finally have that opportunity." He talked faster and faster, and as he did so, Cultivator Shangguan stared in shock, no longer making his leave.

"That person is Elder Sister Xu. Elder Sister Xu, Junior Brother is extremely appreciative of what you did, and is truly unable to pay you back. I would like to offer this pill to you as a measure of my thanks to you for giving me a new lease on life." Meng Hao lifted up his right hand, raising the medicinal pill up high.

Cultivator Shangguan gaped, clearly never having imagined that Meng Hao would say such a thing. A strange expression appeared on his face, and he slowly smiled. Standing next to him in her silver robe, Ms. Xu also stared in shock. Even though she was still cold and detached, there was something different about her expression now. Her cultivation foundation was the seventh level of Qi condensation, thus the Dry Spirit Pills would not be of much help to her. However, Dry Spirit Pills were still relatively rare and not easy to acquire, even for her, a member of the Inner Sect. If she took this pill and melded it together with a few other pills, she could create a new pill worth five normal pills. For a moment, she couldn't help but palpitate with eagerness.

At this moment, even the man in the silver robe with the cool expression looked down at Meng Hao.

Everyone was quiet. The Cultivation monks who had been advancing on Meng Hao suddenly stopped in their tracks, strange expressions on their faces. They stared at him with confusion.

After the brief silence, there was a sudden uproar.

“You can do this...”

“To give away a medicinal pill in front of all these people, to an Inner Sect disciple... who dares to fight for the pill now? That would basically be picking a fight with the Inner Sect.”

“What a simple method! How come I never thought about that? Dammit, dammit!”

“That freaking... I can’t believe I didn’t think of doing this that one time. I was injured so badly I was bed-ridden for three months.”

The people staring at Meng Hao seemed to all have different feelings on the matter. It was hard to say what had happened in ages past, but as for the Cultivation monks here, they had never seen anyone deal with a medicinal pill in this fashion. As of now, Meng Hao had been indefinitely impressed onto everyone’s memories.

As of now, the dragon-carved pillars were completely colorless. The pill still lay in Meng Hao’s outstretched palm, and yet no one moved to take it. This was truly something rare to see in the Reliance Sect.

Ms. Xu’s expression had returned to normal. Without hesitation, her right hand flashed downwards, and the medicinal pill flew from Meng Hao’s hand into hers. Seeing the pill taken away, Meng Hao secretly sighed. However, he knew that in his current state, it could only bring him calamity. Around him, everyone else sighed, feeling angry at Meng Hao. But, as soon as they thought of Elder Sister Xu, any such anger dissipated.

Ms. Xu hesitated for a moment. Considering her status as an Inner Sect disciple, it would be a bit improper to take something so valuable from an Outer Sect disciple and not offer anything in return.

She was silent for a moment, then said, “Years ago, when I was a member of the Outer Sect, an Immortal’s Cave was bestowed to me. I shall

lend it to you to live in.” She reached into her bag of holding and pulled out a white jade slip. She tossed it down toward Meng Hao and he grabbed it from the air.

“Elder Sister Xu’s Immortal’s Cave... this fellow really got lucky. They say there’s a lot of spiritual energy in there, more than anywhere else in the Sect.”

“Elder Sister Xu says she’s going to lend it, but she’s obviously just giving it to him. She just used the word lend so that everyone wouldn’t think too much. This kid really did the right thing in giving her the pill.”

“Dammit, I wish I had thought of this back then.”

Just then, back atop the mountain peaks outside the Outer Sect were the two gray-robed old men who had been betting on the proceedings. Tall and grand, their eyes glittered brightly with praise. They laughed heartily.

“This kid is pretty interesting. He just entered the Sect, but already knows that he should find someone to rely on. Don’t tell me he has innate instincts... Very good, splendid. He comprehends the true meaning of the Reliance Sect. This kid isn’t bad. He really isn’t bad!”

Chapter 6: The Delights of the Copper Mirror

Elder Sister Xu was quite well known in the Reliance Sect. You could say that everyone knew her. That would be because as of now, the Reliance Inner Sect only had two disciples.

Other than Elder Sister Xu, there was only the man currently standing next to Cultivator Shangguan.

After Elder Sister Xu lent him her Immortal's Cave, it had a fear-inspiring effect on everyone, allowing Meng Hao to leave the square with the Spirit Stone and Spirit Condensation pills. Everyone watched him as he left.

As he walked off into the distance, his back soaked with sweat, he felt the glares behind him like invisible blades. They slowly dissipated as he walked quickly away.

In the time it takes 3 incense sticks to burn, Meng Hao walked without stopping. He didn't return to his room in the Outer Sect, but rather followed the white jade slip Elder Sister Xu had given him toward the Southern Mountain. At the foot of the mountain, he located the Immortal's Cave.

Outside, two large stone slabs towered up next to the mountain face. Everything was covered with green branches and vines; it appeared to be a completely unordinary place, very different from Meng Hao's previous two dwellings.

The surroundings here were peaceful and lush. Not far away, a mountain spring flowed down, and the wind carried away the heat, replacing it with cool, fresh air.

Meng Hao stood in front of the mouth of the Immortal's Cave, looking completely content. Now he truly understood how precious such a cave could be, clearly much more than any other dwelling place. No wonder all the other Outer Sect disciples had looked so jealous and envious when

Elder Sister Xu had lent it to him.

“This is a place for Immortals,” said Meng Hao. He waved his right hand, and the slip of white jade flew forward to the cave’s green stone door. It slapped onto the surface, and a buzzing sound filled the air as the door slowly opened.

The Immortal’s Cave was not very big, and only had two rooms. One room was for practicing cultivation, the other was sealed shut with a stone door. Meng Hao entered, and the green stone door slowly closed behind him. When it sealed, the white jade slip flew out and into Meng Hao’s hand. Thereupon, a soft glow began to emanate from the craggy stone ceiling.

The more he looked around, the more satisfied he felt. Finally, his gaze fell upon the sealed stone door. Muttering to himself, he placed the jade slip onto it, and the door slowly opened. At that moment, an odor of thick spiritual energy suddenly wafted out. Meng Hao looked into the stone room, his eyes wide with shock.

“Sister Xu’s Immortal’s Cave, this... this gift is just too valuable.” It took a while for him to recover his composure. He stared blankly into the stone room, at something that appeared to be the mouth of a spring. Out of it gurgled pure spiritual energy, multicolored and glowing as it curled up into the air. Who knew how long it had been accumulating in the stone room. As soon as the door had opened, it began to pour out, its aroma sweet in the nose and mouth. Even just a whiff would fill you with energy.

“So it’s a Spirit Spring,” Meng Hao murmured. It was something else he had never seen before, but had read about in the Qi Condensation Manual. Some springs in the world were Spirit Springs, which had no water. Instead, they flowed forth with spiritual energy. Not many existed, and most were occupied by Cultivation monks, considering how treasured was the spiritual energy they emitted.

The Spirit Spring was relatively small. When all its spiritual energy came out, it was only slightly thicker than outside. To anyone above the third level of Qi condensation, it would not be very helpful. After the third level,

the spiritual energy required was just too much; thus, it was only moderately useful.

Despite that, as far as Meng Hao was concerned, this gift was incomparably valuable, even much more so than a Dry Spirit pill. With this discovery, Meng Hao went nearly wild with joy.

With no time to think, he sat down cross-legged, closed his eyes, and began his Tu Na breathing exercises. After a few hours, the greater part of the spiritual energy that had accumulated here was gone. Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they flashed brilliantly.

“These few hours of meditation here were worth about a month of cultivation outside. This accumulation of spiritual energy took quite some time to build up, and probably won’t be like this again. Even still, practicing cultivation in here, I will be able to achieve speed that’s impossible in the outside world.” He sighed. Looking around, he noticed that the walls were covered with strange markings that he didn’t understand.

“The Spirit Spring can accumulate so much spiritual energy because of these markings. Elder Sister Xu must have used this method to build up energy then dispose of it all in one shot.” Meng Hao thought for another moment, then had an inspiration. He again sat down and began to do Tu Na exercises.

The night passed quickly, and as the sun rose the next morning, Meng Hao opened his eyes. The spiritual energy in the stone room was very thin. But the Spirit Spring was still there. After some period of time passed, the spiritual energy would surely build up again.

Meng Hao took a moment to sense his cultivation level. It seemed that he had made an advancement worth nearly two months.

“If I can practice cultivation in this fashion a few more times, I should be able to break through the first level of Qi condensation and enter the second!” He sucked in a breath, excited. He very much wanted to break through the first level, because only by reaching the second level of Qi condensation could one unlock the first Immortal Skill in the Qi

Condensation Manual.

Thinking of Immortal Skills, Meng Hao left the stone room, closing the stone door as if it were some type of jewel or treasure. He decided to use Elder Sister Xu's method. He wouldn't stand guard next to the Spirit Spring itself. He would just wait for some time to pass, then come back to collect the spiritual energy.

Sitting there in the Immortal's Cave, Meng Hao rubbed his stomach. Thinking over the recent days, and looking down at his skinny belly, he realized that he hadn't eaten any wild animals recently. Not even wild fruits.

After becoming an Outer Sect disciple, he thought to himself, he hadn't been eating as much as when he was a servant. As long as you had enough Spirit Stones, you could take them to the Sect's Pill Cultivation Workshop to exchange them for Fasting Pills or Appetite Control Pills. It was said that one drop of such a pill would prevent hunger for days. Without them, people would have to spend time worrying about finding food.

After thinking about it for a while, Meng Hao decided to go out for a bit. The fresh wind blew past him into the surrounding jungle. As he walked, he pulled the copper mirror out of his bag of holding, as had become his custom.

By now, he was thoroughly convinced that the Treasure Pavilion Brother had tricked him. There was nothing unusual at all about this mirror. In more than half a month of study, he hadn't uncovered anything even slightly peculiar about it.

"Sadly, I only have a half of a Spirit Stone in my bag of holding. I bet I'll need to use it to bribe him to let me exchange it." He stretched his hand into the bag to pull out the Spirit Stone, feeling a bit dejected.

He suddenly froze in place, lifting his head up when he noticed a flash of color off in the distance in the jungle. It wasn't moving very fast. Meng Hao's eyes glittered. Based on his experience in the past months catching wild chickens, he knew exactly what it was. Wild chicken.

Without time to think about shoving the copper mirror and Spirit Stone

back into the bag of holding, he shoved them into a pocket and leaped forward. Ever since spiritual energy had appeared in his body, Meng Hao realized that he was much more nimble than before. Despite still being somewhat frail, he now could burst forth with explosive force.

Especially nowadays, after reaching the first level of Qi condensation, a leap like the one he just made propelled him forward very quickly. In the amount of time it took to breathe ten times, he was able to snatch the alarmed wild chicken. He clasped it by the two wings so that it couldn't move about.

"I wonder how good old Fatty is doing recently," he said, thinking about the fat teenager as he lifted up the chicken. Maybe he would go find him and share a meal of wild game. Just as he turned, he suddenly felt something inside his robe growing hot.

Moments later, the previously quiet chicken in his hand started to struggle wildly and emit miserable squawking sounds. It moved around with such energy than Meng Hao almost couldn't keep hold of it.

The wild chicken struggled even more fiercely, squawking with incomparable shrillness. Then, a popping sound could be heard coming from its butt, which then suddenly exploded, sending blood and gore flying in all directions.

Everything happened so suddenly. Meng Hao stood there gaping. Ever since arriving on the mountain, he had caught quite a few wild chickens. But this was the first time he had seen anything like this. He looked down with shock at the dead chicken and its exploded rear. Then he looked around. Everything was still and quiet. Not even a shadow moved.

"What just happened?" Meng Hao shivered. The wild chicken's death had been quite miserable. It must have experienced incredible pain for its butt exploded.

Meng Hao took in a deep breath, suppressing the anxiety he felt. The wild chicken's death had been too odd and horrific. He felt as if a cold wind was blowing down his back.

"Something's not right," said Meng Hao. He tossed away the dead

chicken, and then pulled out the mirror and the Spirit Stone. He remembered that just before the strange thing had happened with the chicken, something in his robe had started to grow hot.

“Could it be the Spirit Stone...” Then his eyes fell onto the copper mirror. His heart began to beat faster and a powerful radiance shone forth in his eyes.

“Don’t tell me...” The hand holding the mirror began to tremble. He had no time to go eat with the fat teenager. Gripping the mirror, he ran as fast as possible into the jungle, trying to find another wild animal. He needed to know if the wild chicken’s killer really was the mirror.

He didn’t have to run for very long before a wild deer appeared right in front of him. It stood there looking at him stupidly, then angrily. Meng Hao immediately shined the mirror onto it.

The deer’s expression changed immediately. It leaped to flee, calling out miserably, in a heart-rending fashion difficult to describe. Anyone who heard it could only imagine how miserable the creature must be. Meng Hao could clearly see the animal’s flank as it leaped into the air. Before it could land, its butt exploded with a bang, its body twitching as it fell.

Looking at the dead deer, then back at the mirror, an unprecedented look of excitement appeared on Meng Hao’s face.

“What a treasure! A real treasure!!

“It’s so strange. A treasure that explodes the butts of wild animals...” Even though he didn’t understand it completely, he was still very excited. Regardless of why the treasure did this, he had an itching desire to go test it out on some more animals.

Chapter 7: I Need Spirit Stones!

As he walked, he grew more and more excited. The road he walked was filled with blood and gore...

The blood and gore of scores of wild animals, whose butts had exploded violently.

“Bang!” Another furry animal in front of him screamed shrilly as an invisible attack struck its rear end, three times, until it exploded, sending a mist of blood spraying into the air.

“Boom!” A foraging giant condor, not even landed on the ground yet, shrieked miserably, as if it were experiencing a nightmare. Then its butt exploded.

“Bang, boom.” That was a fierce, human-sized tiger that had been about to pounce on Meng Hao. In mid-air, it emitted a terrifying roar that changed into a horrific squeal, whereupon its butt blew open, showering gore and blood everywhere. Perhaps because it had so much fur, it actually exploded five times in succession.

“What a treasure. What a mighty treasure.” Before he knew it, dusk had fallen, and Meng Hao’s expression could not be more excited. He looked down at the copper mirror. Throughout the day, he had exploded the butts of over one-hundred animals.

Fortunately, he was out in the multitudinous wild mountains, otherwise the stench of the blood and gore would be overwhelming.

“The mirror isn’t completely effective, though. When I tried it out on that python, and the fish, it didn’t do anything at all. It seems it doesn’t work on animals with scales. But it’s still awesome.” He had tested it out in many ways and had discovered that it didn’t work when inside the bag of holding. It only worked when he held it. He also got a strange, excited feeling when it was at work exploding wild animals’ rear ends. It also looked like the corrosion was beginning to fade, as if it had been hidden away for years and finally was able to stretch its legs.

As dusk fell, Meng Hao found himself some distance out in the wild mountains. The night wind blew, and he took in a deep, excited breath. He was just getting ready to head back to the Immortal's Cave. After all, these mountains were filled with wild animals. Meng Hao had even heard that demonic beasts who practiced cultivation lived out here. Despite his excitement, he also knew that it could be dangerous.

He had come to this place while searching for wild animals, so the going had been slow. But on the way back, he could go much more quickly. Meng Hao sped along through the wooded mountains, and before long, a bright moon hung high in the sky. Soon, he could see that only three mountains lay between him and the Immortal's Cave. Suddenly, he felt a hot wind on his face, accompanied by an acrid odor. He stopped, his heart thumping, then retreated a few steps.

Roar!

As soon as he stepped back, the air about him shook with a mighty roar, and once again the hot wind and acrid odor over swept over him. There in front of him was a monkey-like creature about the size of a human. Its red eyes radiated cruelty, and its entire body was covered with fur so thick and long that it dragged on the ground.

The fierce beast gave Meng Hao a bloodthirsty stare. Meng Hao's expression changed as he looked back at the creature. His mind reeled, as if he were about to be blown away by the creature's gaze. He could sense the creature's cultivation foundation fluctuating.

"Second level of Qi condensation!" Meng Hao took another step back, his expression horrified. This was no wild beast; it was a demonic beast. It must have been attracted by the reek of blood from all the slain animals.

There was no time for him to think. The long-furred monkey-like demonic beast leaped into the air, and then suddenly, its entire body was covered in fire, a fire that did not singe its fur in the least. It shot toward Meng Hao.

At this critical juncture, Meng Hao's expression changed. He wasn't sure if the copper mirror would be effective against the demonic beast, but

there was no time for consideration. Even as it leaped into the air, he ducked to the side, pulled out the mirror and shined it toward the demonic beast.

Then a miserable scream filled the air. In mid-air, a geyser of blood shot out of the demonic beast's butt. Its face twisted in horror, its eyes no longer filled with cruelty, but rather confusion. It was as if in the beast's entire life, it had never experienced anything so painful.... But, it didn't retreat. Moments later, more blood exploded out.

Now the confusion in its expression turned into complete astonishment. It stared in horror at the mirror held in the hands of the young man standing in front of it. It turned, covering its rear end with its claws. The fire went out, and it made to flee, but before it could go more than a few meters, its butt exploded again, this time, five explosions in succession. Its screams rang out as it ran about ten more meters. Meng Hao felt the copper mirror trembling as if with excitement. A powerful boom rang out, shooting straight toward the demonic beast's rear end.

An incomprehensible scream rang out over the wild mountains as half of the demonic beast's body exploded. A cloud of blood and gore shot up, then slowly descended to the ground. Confusion filled its face as it gasped a few last breaths, then died.

Everything had happened so fast. The entire time, Meng Hao just stood there gaping. Finally, he took a breath, then looked down at the mirror, panting.

"Even demonic beasts can't avoid having their rear ends exploded. This mirror..." In his excitement, Meng Hao felt even more awe. He put it away, then looked over at the corpse of the demonic beast, his heart thumping.

"The Qi Condensation Manual has an introduction to demonic beasts. It says that they have a Demonic Essence inside their bodies which contains spiritual energy. I should be able to just eat it." He quickly walked over to the corpse. Sure enough, in the abdomen of the creature he found a pristine Demonic Essence, about the size of a fingernail. It emitted a delicate, fragrant aroma which left him feeling extremely comfortable.

Having retrieved the Demonic Essence, Meng Hao hurried along his way. Unfortunately, demonic creatures were not common in these parts. He didn't see any more on his way back to the Immortal's cave. He felt a little disappointed.

By the time he got back, it was deep into the night. He sat down cross-legged and looked at the Demonic Essence and the copper mirror, his eyes shining.

"I can just eat the Demonic Essence, but I still have the Spirit Condensation Pill that the Sect distributed. I'll take that first, then take the Demonic Essence." His mind set, Meng Hao put the Demonic Essence and the copper mirror down next to him, as well as the half-chunk of Spirit Stone. With the Spirit Stone at his side, it would allow him to absorb a little more spiritual energy.

Next, he took out the Spirit Condensation Pill and swallowed it down. As soon as it entered his body, strands of spiritual energy began to spread out slowly. Meng Hao circulated his cultivation foundation, quickly absorbing the power of the medicinal pill.

When he opened his eyes an hour later, they glittered brightly. Taking this pill was definitely much faster than actually practicing cultivation, he thought to himself. Unfortunately, the Spirit Condensation Pill just did not have enough energy. There wasn't anything he could do about that, though. His gaze shifted to the side and he picked up the Demonic Essence and popped it into his mouth.

As soon as it entered his body, spiritual energy far outmatching that of the Spirit Cultivation Pill poured into him. It was almost too much to take in. He quickly circulated his cultivation foundation and poured the energy into it. His body began to tremble, and strands of filth were pushed out of his pores. Eight or ten hours later, his head buzzed, and he felt as if his body would begin to float. Now, there was not a strand of spiritual energy inside him. The strand had fused to form a stream.

"Spiritual energy like a stream, the body excretes the mortal filth. This... Don't tell me this is the second level of Qi condensation?" Meng Hao

opened his eyes. They shined with an indescribable expression. He looked down at his body, then cast his senses inside and took a long moment to examine himself carefully. Sure enough, he had broken through the first level of Qi condensation into the second.

“Demonic Essences really are incredibly effective.” Meng Hao’s eyes sparkled. He stood and strolled around the Immortal’s Cave, enjoying the feel of the stream-like spiritual energy circulating through his body. He was incredibly happy.

“I am now a second level Qi condensation Immortal!

“Too bad Demonic Essences are so rare. Otherwise, I would be able to practice cultivation much more quickly. And it’s all thanks to my treasured mirror.” Meng Hao looked at the mirror. When he did, his body suddenly trembled, and he unconsciously rubbed his eyes. He looked even more closer, an incredulous expression filling his face.

The copper mirror lay there just like before. But there was no Spirit Stone on top of it. Instead, there was a Demonic Essence!

“This... this...” Meng Hao’s brain spun, filled with confusion. He felt as if he had lost his mind. He stared mutely at the Demonic Essence sitting on top of the copper mirror and began to hesitate. He had placed a Demonic Essence and a Spirit Stone onto the mirror. He remembered clearly. But, he had eaten the Demonic Essence already. Suddenly, he wasn’t so sure. Had he eaten the Demonic Essence? Or had he eaten the Spirit Stone?

“I couldn’t have eaten the Spirit Stone...” Meng Hao gaped for some time then slowly picked up the Demonic Essence. He hesitated, then put it in front of his mouth and sniffed. The smell made him certain; what he had eaten moments ago was definitely a Demonic Essence.

“What... what’s going on? There’s another one? Don’t tell me I was mistaken, and the demonic beast actually had two Demonic Essences in it?” Meng Hao’s felt even more confused. He shook his head, forcing himself to clear his thoughts. He looked at the Demonic Essence, then the copper mirror. His body began to tremble and his eyes shone with an incredible brilliance, as if he had just glimpsed ten thousand pieces of

gold. It seemed as if he would drop the Demonic Essence at any moment.

“Could it be... the mirror absorbed the Spirit Stone and produced a second Demonic Essence!” His voice quavered. He originally felt that the mirror’s ability to explode wild beasts was powerful enough. He had never imagined that it would have an even more profound ability.

After a while, he recovered a bit, although his heart was still filled with a multitude of thoughts. Right now, he didn’t have a Spirit Stone to test out, so his heart was filled with anxiety. He was filled with an aching desire to get one to experiment with.

“Spirit Stones. I need Spirit Stones!” His eyes shone like a ferocious wild beast. At this moment, Spirit Stones were more valuable than gold in his eyes. His desire for them was even stronger than his previous desire to become an official.

Spirit Stones are indispensable to Cultivation monks, especially Meng Hao. When worrying about personal gains and losses, one’s heart will be filled with nervousness and anxiety. As of now, Meng Hao’s desire to acquire Spirit Stones was stronger than anything he had ever experienced.

Unfortunately, the Reliance Sect was a small Sect. Other than the monthly Pill Distribution Day, there were almost no chances to get them, other than by taking them from others.

“There’s one month until the next Pill Distribution Day.” Meng Hao looked at the copper mirror, and his expression grew ferocious. Moments later, the ferocity disappeared, hidden away. Right now, his cultivation foundation was only at the second level of Qi condensation. Even if he wanted to take something by force, he wouldn’t be a match for anyone.

“Back in Yunjie Village, I had no money,” said Meng Hao helplessly. “Now I’m an Immortal, and I still have no money.” In his mind, he pondered how he could get his hands on more Spirit Stones.

Chapter 8: Zhao Wugang

“It’s only one more month, but during that month, I must fight to increase my cultivation foundation one step further.” He carefully put the copper mirror back into the bag of holding. He knew that he could not let anyone know of its abilities. If he did, it would be difficult for him to keep ahold of it, and he would surely lose his life in the process.

He looked down at himself, and the filth that covered him. In his excitement, he had almost forgotten about his dirty state. But now, he had calmed down quite a bit. He walked out of the Immortal’s cave to the nearby stream and washed off the grime and impurities.

By the time he returned, the sky was growing light. He took out the Qi Condensation Manual and began to study it.

“Upon reaching the second level of Qi condensation, one can use Immortal Skills. Upon reaching the fifth level, one can study Wind Walking technique, which is an Immortal Skill similar to flying.” Meng Hao closed his eyes, feeling thorough anticipation regarding the Wind Walking technique of the fifth level of Qi condensation.

In that instant, he suddenly felt the temperature increase rapidly within the Immortal’s cave. Then, tongues of fire appeared on his right hand. Considering that he still thought like a mortal, seeing this caused his heart and mind to feel great excitement, which in turn extinguished the flames.

Meng Hao promptly calmed himself and circulated his condensation foundation. Unfortunately, by the time afternoon arrived, after dozens of attempts, he still could do nothing more than produce a few sparks, whereupon the spiritual energy in his body would disperse.

“It’s difficult to use this Flame Serpent art,” said Meng Hao with a frown. But he had a persistent personality and would not be discouraged easily, so he practiced Tu Na breathing for a while before trying again.

Night fell, and then dawn came again. For two days Meng Hao tried again and again, failing each time, until he became completely exhausted. When the spiritual energy dispersed he would do Tu Na breathing, and the

resolve in his eyes would grow stronger and stronger.

“I can’t believe I can’t use the Flame Serpent art!” said Meng Hao, grinding his teeth and slapping his palm against the bag of holding. Moments later, the Demonic Essence appeared in his hand.

He knew that if he consumed the Essence, and the mirror really had some other fantastic properties, then later when he had enough Spirit Stones, he would lack an original with which to make copies.

“Oh well, no need to worry about such details. Worst case scenario, I go back out into the mountains to look for demonic beasts.” He hesitated for a moment, then popped the Demonic Essence into his mouth, closed his eyes, and began his Tu Na breathing. Spiritual energy exploded inside of him, pouring into every corner of his body.

Time passed, and soon it was afternoon. Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they flashed. His cultivation foundation was still at the second level but was definitely much stronger.

“I think with three or maybe five more, I can reach the third level of Qi condensation.” He felt somewhat disappointed, realizing that the higher his cultivation foundation, the more difficult it would be to make progress. But anticipation filled his heart when he thought of the copper mirror. He raised his hand into the air and made a fist.

As he raised his fist, flames appeared, congealing on his right arm and creating a small flaming serpent as long as a finger, which radiated an oppressing heat. Meng Hao felt the spiritual energy in his body instantly reduced by thirty percent.

His face grew pale, but understanding flashed in his eyes and he smiled. He leaped out of the Immortal’s Cave and waved his right hand. The Flame Serpent flew, slamming into a nearby tree.

A banging sound rang out, and the entire tree was engulfed in flame, and within moments had collapsed into ashes.

“I have to find a chance to do this in front of Fatty. He’ll definitely praise me then.” He smiled broadly, feeling quite heroic.

Half a month's time passed, during which Meng Hao searched the mountains for demonic beasts and trained his Flame Serpent art. He worked harder than he had in his secular studies, and soon was quite proficient with it, and was also able to reduce the amount of spiritual energy it used. But it still required considerable effort over the space of about ten breaths to be able to form it.

He also went into the Outer Sect and secretly tried the mirror out on some of the disciples. However, there was no reaction whatsoever. After a few tries, Meng Hao concluded that the copper mirror only worked on excessively furred creatures. A bit of a pity, but the mirror was still more powerful than he could have ever wished for.

Unfortunately, during the half month that passed, he never came across any demonic creatures, and his cultivation foundation became mostly stagnant. Thankfully, every time after he practiced the Flame Serpent art, his cultivation foundation would grow a little bit during the recovery period. However, he did not dare to engage in such practice in the wild mountains. Only in the Immortal's Cave.

"There are ten more days until Pill Distribution Day. I'm going to go further out into the mountains." Having made his decision, Meng Hao departed early in the morning, heading quickly out into the deep mountains.

He didn't rest during the day, and by the time night fell, he'd forgotten how many mountain chains he'd passed through. Finally, at the foot of a black mountain, he ran into a bear-shaped demonic beast.

During the battle, he used the Flame Serpent art and the powerful copper mirror. A series of five explosions were followed by a miserable, reverberating scream, whereupon the creature died in a pool of blood.

He took its Essence, and was about to head further along the black mountain when suddenly, the hairs on his body stood on end. Some distance ahead of him had appeared five demonic beasts with the heads of elephants and bodies of tigers. They stared at him, eyes cold.

With the mirror, he could easily handle one demonic beast. But five

would be very difficult. He slowly retreated backwards, his right hand clutching the mirror tightly.

Suddenly, a massive roar sounded out from the trees covering the black mountain. It grew in intensity until it was like a huge explosion seething in the air. Meng Hao's expression changed, and he ran away as fast as possible, without the slightest intention of slowing down even a bit.

Fortunately, the five demonic beasts didn't pursue him, and he soon disappeared into the mountains.

"That cry sounded similar to when Uncle Shangguan called out. It seems there are a lot of demonic beasts in that black mountain, even Greater demonic beasts." As he sped along, he looked back at the black mountain, more and more convinced of what a dangerous place it was.

Ten days passed by quickly. With the black mountain as his boundary, Meng Hao ventured into the mountains but didn't come across any more demonic beasts. The Bear Demonic Essence in his bag of holding seemed more and more precious, so he didn't eat it.

Pill Distribution Day arrived, and the sound of bells filled the air. Meng Hao left the Immortal's Cave and entered the Outer Sect. When he had departed a month ago, his cultivation foundation was the first level of Qi condensation, and now it was the second. Even though he was some distance from the third level, he speculated that if the copper mirror was as effective as he imagined, in the future he would progress by leaps and bounds.

As fearful as ever about suffering a loss, Meng Hao entered the Pill Distribution Square. Many of the disciples looked at him as he entered, obviously recognizing him.

His actions the previous month had caused quite a shock to the Outer Sect. Even though his cultivation level was low, and a month had passed, the matter had been discussed quite a bit.

This time, it was not Cultivator Shangguan who presided, but another middle-aged man. Like last time, he distributed a Spirit Cultivation Pill and half a Spirit Stone. But there was no Individual Pill distribution this

time.

As soon as the pill and the Spirit Stone were in his bag of holding, and the pillars grew dark, Meng Hao left as quickly as possible, not hesitating a moment. As he left, his eyes swept across the square, and he saw quite a few Cultivation monks blocking fellow disciples to take medicinal pills and Spirit Stones.

Elder Sister Xu's blessing still seemed to have an effect. Coupled with his quick departure, the only thing he received was a few cold stares. No one attempted to take anything from him.

He breathed a sigh of relief. He was well aware that Elder Sister Xu's name could only protect him for so long. This month was fine, but in a few more months, someone would surely make a move against him.

"As long as the copper mirror works, in a few months... we'll see who will be snatching from whom!" Eyes glittering, he lowered his head and walked a bit faster.

He left the Outer Sect, eager to try out the copper mirror, walking as fast as possible back towards the Immortal's Cave. When the cave was not far off, he suddenly stopped in his tracks, his pupil's narrowing. A person had just walked out of the jungle.

He wore a green robe and looked to be about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. He had an arrogant look on his fierce face as he stood there staring coldly at Meng Hao. His cultivation foundation was not that of an ordinary person. It was the third level of Qi condensation. The man stood there, blocking Meng Hao's way.

"Greetings, Brother Zhao," said Meng Hao, his expression changing as he took a few steps back. He moved his left hand behind his back, and began moving about in the air. He had seen this person before. Just about everyone in the Outer Sect knew Brother Zhao Wugang. He was cruel and ruthless, and quite a few low-level disciples had died by his hand in the Public Zone. He was the kind of person to ingratiate himself to disciples above the third level, but lord it over the first and second levels.

"So, you've heard of me," said Zhao Wugang coldly. "I don't need to

make any more introductions. Hand over your medicinal pill and Spirit Stone.” Others didn’t dare to even touch Meng Hao, but Zhao Wugang had entered the Sect years ago and knew how things worked. Elder Sister Xu often secluded herself, ignoring the lives of the people beneath her.

“Brother Zhao, can’t you make an exception?” said Meng Hao, taking a few steps back. “I... I’m just a simple scholar, and I just got the Spirit Stone and medicinal pill. Can’t you give me a bit of time with them?” This person’s cultivation level was greater than his by more than an entire level. Furthermore, he had never fought anyone before. His face grew pale from fear.

“You call yourself a scholar?” He sneered, then laughed loudly. “Don’t tell me you were a scholar before you came here? Come, come, recite some poetry for me, Brother. Maybe you’ll lighten my mood and I won’t beat you and break your legs.”

“Brother Zhao...” Meng Hao was extremely nervous, and quite angry as well, but he had no choice but to hold on and try to talk some sense into the man. “The sages said, if...”

“Shut up. I’ll take not only your medicinal pill and Spirit Stone, but the Immortal’s Cave as well. From now on, we are fellow disciples in the outside world, but in the cave, you will be my servant. If you say even one more word, I’ll help you to understand the meaning of the expression ‘death is better than life!’” Glaring murderously, he began walking toward Meng Hao.

His cultivation foundation had already broken through to the third level, and needed large amounts of spiritual energy. So of course he had taken a fancy to Meng Hao’s Immortal’s Cave. However, he still feared Elder Sister Xu, so he had come up with the idea to keep him as a servant. After some time passed, Elder Sister Xu would surely forget the nobodies beneath her, and he could just kill Meng Hao. Or if he didn’t kill him, he could cripple him and force him to stick around reciting poetry to show how elegant Zhao Wugang was.

“The Immortal’s Cave belongs to Elder Sister Xu. How could I act as her

agent? Brother Zhao, please don't make things so hard for me." Behind his back, strands of spiritual energy had collected in Meng Hao's right hand. He knew that he wasn't a match for Zhao Wugang, but the Immortal's Cave was just too important, and the Spirit Stone even more so. There was no way he would hand it over. Therefore, his heart filled with uncertainty and anger, he used the name of Elder Sister Xu.

"I give you some face and you ignore it," said Zhao Wugang with a snort. "You're just looking for trouble. I'll definitely teach you what it means to prefer death over life!" An impatient expression on his face, he raced toward Meng Hao, his outstretched hands twisting like claws. Meng Hao looked completely shocked and frightened, which Zhao Wugang liked. He enjoyed seeing such looks on the face of people weaker than him.

He could just imagine Meng Hao dropping to the ground in front of him, trembling. Just when he was feeling most proud of himself, right before he reached Meng Hao, Meng Hao's horrified expression disappeared, to be replaced with sternness. He flung his right hand out from behind his back, and a burning, finger-long Flame Serpent shot toward Zhao Wugang.

Meng Hao's heart thumped furiously. He knew that the Flame Serpent art was not strong enough to kill his opponent, but he still hoped that it would at least slow him down. He could not bear to be captured, much less hand over all his possessions and become a servant. He would flee into the mountains in an instant if he could.

"Flame Serpent art!" Zhao Wugang's expression changed, and he retreated backwards. His hand slapped his bag of holding and produced a small white sword, which he threw toward the Flame Serpent.

There was a bang, and the flame serpent disappeared. The white sword had been twisted and bent, so he kicked it aside into the jungle. Looking quite embarrassed, Zhao Wugang continued to move backwards, watching as Meng Hao fled into the mountains. He was both furious and astonished.

"He reached the second level of Qi condensation so quickly," said Zhao Wugang furiously. "Elder Sister Xu's Immortal's Cave really is effective. It

seems I must kill this guy.” He raced off in pursuit.

After pursuing him for a bit, he found that Meng Hao was much more familiar with this part of the mountain than him. Furthermore, he ran very quickly. Zhao Wugang was having trouble catching him.

“You little bastard,” called Zhao Wugang in a sinister voice. “There’s no one out here in these mountains. Do you want to die? I’m gonna finish you!” Considering how quickly Meng Hao was running, he decided that it was time to use one of his more powerful techniques. He roared, and his body expanded, the hair on his body growing thick and golden-colored. Some of the hair even stuck out through his clothing. It looked as if he had transformed into something like a demonic beast.

This was a technique he had picked up before joining the Sect: the Were-demon skill.

It was a skill which could be cultivated after reaching the second level of Qi condensation, but the demonic transformation was not very obvious. The body grew bigger and stronger, and more frightening. Such a skill would allow him to rampage among lower-level disciples. He could only use this skill for a limited time, but it was quite effective. His killing trump card.

Now that his cultivation foundation had reached the third level of Qi condensation, the skill was even more fully developed. Being able to grow such thick, golden fur was a pleasant surprise. Being able to shapeshift into a demonic form like this would enable him to easily shock his opponents. He brimmed with confidence, his thick, golden fur shining brightly, mighty and domineering. Fur even grew from his face. He looked exactly like a human-shaped demonic beast.

“You will be the first person to die under my Were-demon skill! How just and fair!”

Chapter 9: Impatience and Frustration

Using this technique at the third level allowed Zhao Wugang to increase his strength by several degrees, as well as his speed. Grinning hideously, face full of greed, he charged toward Meng Hao, sharp claws glittering in the sunlight.

He brimmed with confidence, certain that Meng Hao's fear would break him. Flee he might, but escape he could not.

"Run," laughed Zhao Wugang with a ferocious smile, his powerful voice reverberating through the air. "You can't escape the skills of Zhao Wugang."

When Zhao Wugang shapeshifted into demonic form, Meng Hao was fleeing up ahead. He saw what happened out of the corner of his eye, and a look of surprise filled his face. But then, it seemed he'd thought of something, and a different, stranger expression replaced the surprise. This demonic form looked exactly like the forms of the various beasts that had been exploded by the copper mirror. In fact, he had even more radiant fur covering his body than those other beasts had.

Meng Hao looked carefully at Zhao Wugang, the strange expression still covering his face. The thick, golden fur made him look like some sort of king of beasts.

When Zhao Wugang saw the look on Meng Hao's face, he felt astonished. When he had broken through to the third level of Qi condensation, he had tried out the Were-demon form, but this was the first time he had revealed it to another person. Meng Hao's strange expression irritated him. He let out a cold harrumph, and a murderous look appeared in his eyes.

"I think... you'll probably like this copper mirror," said Meng Hao. Seeing Zhao Wugang's speed increase so much in his Were-demon form, he realized that he would close the distance between them rapidly. He took a few steps back and slapped the bag of holding with his right hand. Instantly, the copper mirror appeared. With the strange expression still

covering his face, he shined the mirror onto Zhao Wugang in all his arrogant splendor.

As soon as the mirror began to shine, Meng Hao felt it begin to emit a burning heat that he had never felt before. This was a much stronger reaction than when it had encountered other demonic beasts, as if some sort of powerful thirst had been unleashed within it. At that moment, a sort of invisible gas burst forth from the mirror and shot forward.

Zhao Wugang leaped toward Meng Hao, his aura radiating murder and ferocity. Suddenly, he felt strange, as if some sort of gas had entered his body. It roiled violently within him, and from the outside it looked as if the gas were trying to claw its way out. Zhao Wugang's expression changed. He felt severe pain in his organs, which quickly rose to a critical level. Without thinking, he pushed the gas down to his dantian region, in order to force it out.

The gas was powerful, and it seemed to be seeking a weak spot in his body to emerge from. When he pushed the gas down toward his dantian, it rushed directly toward his buttocks, and in an instant, exploded out with violent, gut-wrenching pain. Zhao Wugang let out an uncontrollable, blood-curdling scream.

He had never made such a sound before in his life, because never before had he experienced something like this. His body began to tremble, and he glared wrathfully at Meng Hao. The murder in his bloodshot eyes grew fiercer.

"Brother Zhao," said Meng Hao, his heart thumping. This was the first time he had ever fought someone. "Why don't we end things here? If you don't make things hard for me, I won't make things hard for you. A happy ending." He clamped his hand over the mirror. The sound of his opponents scream had unsettled him. He couldn't take it. After all, this was a person, not a demonic beast.

"You little bastard!" shouted Zhao Wugang. "Today, I'm not just going to kill you; I'm going to go down the mountain, find your family and kill them too! I'll humiliate your entire clan!" The pain had caused him to

nearly go mad. His eyes burned, and with a roar, he pounced toward Meng Hao, sharp claws preparing to rip him to shreds.

Meng Hao was just a scholar, and had never been in a fight. But he possessed courage, and hearing Zhao Wugang say such things caused murderous intent to shine in his eyes. There was no point in trying to talk reason to a person who clearly wanted to provoke him. He couldn't bear to hear the miserable screams, but hearing threats like that would cause anyone to lose their temper. He took a few steps back and unflinchingly held up the mirror.

As Zhao Wugang approached, he felt something roaring toward him. Once again, the terrifying gas entered his body. Considering what he had just experienced, he protected himself, sealing off the gas so it couldn't escape. But just when he was feeling confident in his success, the gas shot through his body, rumbling, then exploded out of his left ear.

The pain was many times more severe than before, and he let out a horrible, shrill shriek that was impossible to describe. Then, his right ear exploded, showering out blood.

His head felt as if it were about to split down the middle, and his face had grown pale white. Dumb with astonishment, he stared at Meng Hao. Then his face filled with monstrous savagery.

"I will kill your entire family, and then eliminate your whole clan! I'll make them all feel pain like this, then let them die screaming!" Enduring the pain, and also deaf, he leaped toward Meng Hao, filled with insane determination to kill his opponent.

"I give you face and you ignore it!" said Meng Hao, gaping. He had never seen the mirror explode an ear before. Looking stern, he retreated further, again shining the mirror onto Zhao Wugang.

"Meng Hao!!" screamed Zhao Wugang, his right ear exploding into shreds. Both ears swelled. His expression was no longer one of ferocious rage but rather astonishment and dread. He turned, faster than he had ever turned in his life, and made to flee, having lost any desire to mess with Meng Hao. But the fear in his heart caused him to tremble so

violently that he couldn't even flee. Instead, he focused, and once again, summoned his desire to kill. He would inflict pain on Meng Hao's family, and also take away that damned copper mirror.

However, even as he turned, the mirror, for the first time ever, flew out of Meng Hao's hands. It seemed its interest had been aroused. It flew after Zhao Wugang, attacking him multiple times. Zhao Wugang's eyes filled with desperation; it appeared as if some incredible power had entered his body. He screamed uncontrollably, unable to flee. Something tossed him into the air and his left ear, right ear, chest and legs all exploded violently.

As the gas exploded out, it sent mists of blood into the air, and in the space of time it takes to breathe ten times, Zhao Wugang's eyes grew dark, and his body slowly shifted from Were-demon form back to normal. The fur disappeared, and seemingly because of this, the copper mirror lost interest and flew back to Meng Hao. Zhao Wugang's body dropped to the ground.

Blood covered everything. Zhao Wugang's dead eyes still shone with horror and despair. Anyone who laid eyes upon him would surely tremble.

Looking at Zhao Wugang's corpse, Meng Hao sucked in a deep breath. The copper mirror flew back into his hand, whereupon his body shook. Awe and veneration filled his eyes. Seeing some wild animals explode was not a big deal, but this time it had been a living person. Seeing the blood and gore everywhere, he trembled. The stench of death on the mirror caused him to want to get rid of the mirror. He loosened his hand and tossed it to the ground.

He was just a scholar, after all. The mirror had seemed interesting at first, but now it seemed incredibly gruesome, and conflicted with the Confucian ideals which Meng Hao believed in.

He stood in silence for some time, feeling flustered at heart. The frustration could be seen in his eyes. In his heart, he was still a scholar from Yunjie Village. He spoke truth to people, and had never been in a fight, let alone killed anyone. That behavior was deeply rooted in his heart, and could not easily be changed. As he contemplated the situation, his

heart struggled.

“The etiquette, happiness, kindness and justice of Confucianism, and its search for truth, demands a refraining from killing. But the Sect says ‘the strong shall prey on the weak.’ Now I understand the truth of that saying, but to actually put it into practice is different...” Trembling, Meng Hao felt frightened even just thinking about what had happened. After a long time, he let out a long sigh and started to walk off.

But having taken only a few steps, he ground his teeth, turned, and walked back to Zhao Wugang’s corpse. He picked up his bag of holding, then summoned a Flame Serpent and placed it onto the body.

The fire didn’t completely eat up the corpse, so Meng Hao consumed a Spirit Condensation Pill, then shot three more Flame Serpents down. Soon the corpse had withered up to the point where it was unrecognizable.

He did some Tu Na breathing, gritted his teeth, then shot down two more Flame Serpents. Now, the corpse was completely ash.

Glancing at the mirror on the ground, he clenched his jaw, walked over, and picked it up, gripping it firmly.

Still feeling conflicted and afraid, Meng Hao left, walking back to the Immortal’s Cave as quickly as possible. He sat in a daze. For a long time he just sat there, before finally moving again to open Zhao Wugang’s bag of holding. When he saw what was inside, his eyes glittered. The dark mood caused by his first kill suddenly changed.

“This guy was so rich,” he exclaimed, sucking in a breath. The bag of holding contained eight chunks of Spirit Stone, seven Spirit Condensing Pills and a bone fragment covered with strange symbols.

He looked at the bone fragment, then immediately tossed it aside. It described the Were-demon technique. He didn’t dare to even touch it. He didn’t want to turn into a Were-demon and then be destroyed by his own copper mirror.

As he tossed the bone chip aside, he suddenly remembered the flying sword. He immediately walked out of the cave and tracked it down in the

jungle. He lifted up the short white sword and returned to the cave to examine it, eyes glittering.

Meng Hao couldn't think of how to reconcile the differences between the ways of Immortals and the path of Confucius. He decided to stop thinking about the matter. Maybe he would understand it one day, but for now, the most important thing was to figure out a way to stay alive in the Sect.

Eyes filled with resolved, he took the Spirit Stones out and felt them. Then he pulled out the copper mirror and put it down next to him, looking at it for some time.

"Brother Zhao provoked me," he murmured. "I had to strike back. I tried to smooth things out, but he refused. I killed someone, but I tried to be reasonable. I tried to be kind, but he rushed into death.

"The mirror reeks of blood. In the hands of an evildoer, it would be a tool of evil, but in my hands, it will be different. I have Confucian kindness in my heart, and this treasure is mine. It will be different." He looked down at the mirror and took a deep breath.

"It doesn't just explode things, and doesn't just seek blood. In the future, I will use it carefully." He muttered to himself like this for some time, then lifted his head, thinking about the other mystery of the mirror, and his hope. He ground his teeth.

"Success or failure. Now we'll see. If it's a success, then Meng Hao's cultivation practice will be anything but ordinary." With no more hesitation, Meng Hao pulled out the Demonic Essence and a half-Spirit Stone, then placed them down onto the mirror. He waited with nervous anticipation.

Enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, but absolutely nothing happened. The Demonic Essence didn't change, the Spirit Stone didn't disappear. There was still only one Demonic Essence.

Meng Hao frowned. He paced around the cave for a bit before looking back at the mirror.

“It can’t be. Last month it definitely made two...” He stared at the Spirit Stone on the mirror, lost in thought. After a while, he slapped the bag of holding and pulled out another half of a Spirit Stone, which he carefully placed down onto the mirror.

Almost as soon as he put the Spirit Stone down, a black aura flashed across the surface of the mirror, and it seemed to turn into a lake. The two Spirit Stone chunks sank down, and the blackness rippled, condensing onto the Demonic Essence. And then, next to the first Demonic Essence appeared a second!

Meng Hao was stupefied. Even though he had prepared himself in heart, he was still shocked. After some time passed, he picked up the two Demonic Essences and examined them excitedly.

“So it’s true! How profound!” He began to breathe hard, and took some time before he could pull himself back together. Suddenly everything seemed possible. He took a few deep breaths, then tried out the process again.

One Stone chunk, two Stone chunks... nine Stone chunks, he only had one left over. In front of him were four full Demonic Essences. If you counted the original, that would be five.

The stones emitted a sweet aroma which grew thick in the air, leaving him feel intoxicated. A silly grin on his face, he realized that this was the most wealth he had ever possessed in his entire life. It was a sight none of the disciples of the Outer Sect had even seen.

His excitement lasted until deep into the night. Clutching the Demonic Essences, he placed one onto his tongue and swallowed it down. Two hours later, he opened his eyes and took another pill.

He had never done something so extravagant before. By the time the seemingly boundless energy of the two Demonic Essences was fully dispersed in his body, dawn had arrived.

His body thrummed, and gobs of filth had been excreted through his pores. When he opened his eyes they shone brilliantly.

“The third level of Qi condensation!” Meng Hao was still not content. He looked down at the remaining three pills. He took another one. By the dawn the next day, he had consumed all the Demonic Essences. His cultivation foundation was just a hair away from being at the peak of the third level of Qi condensation.

As far as the eight Spirit Condensation pills, they would not be of much use to Meng Hao considering his current cultivation foundation. Even taking all of them at once wouldn’t do much good. He suspected that it had something to do with the Demonic Essences. Considering that the Spirit Cultivation Pills were regularly distributed by the sect, they shouldn’t be so ineffective.

“A small amount won’t do. Even if I took dozens, it wouldn’t have much of an effect.” Meng Hao closed his eyes, concentrating on the spiritual energy in his body. It was no longer a stream; it had turned into a river. It was not a massive river, but definitely larger than a stream. As it circulated through his body, it gave him a feeling of power. He could sense an astonishing amount of energy filling him.

Considering the shocking level of power, Meng Hao knew that compared to yesterday, he had undergone a thorough rebirth. Before, he was a little monk who anyone could push around. Now, amongst the third level disciples who could occupy the Public Zone, his cultivation foundation was so high that it placed him as one of the most powerful.

He waved his right hand excitedly and a Flame Serpent as long as his arm roared to life. Its heat immediately filled the Immortal’s Cave. The fierce Flame Serpent, filled with awe-inspiring savagery, spit out a blast of fire.

If he ran into Zhao Wugang now, his Flame Serpent would fly forth. If it didn’t kill him, it would at the very least seriously injure him.

Chapter 10: Wang Tengfei

Toward the end of September, it grew as hot as usual. The heat refused to dissipate, instead growing more and more intense. In the southern regions of the Nanshan Continent, in the State of Zhao, things usually began to cool down around November. By January, the freezing grip of winter could be felt.

One morning at dawn, Meng Hao left the Immortal's Cave, eyes shining, full of hope regarding the future.

"My cultivation foundation is just a hair away from the peak of the third level of Qi condensation," he said, taking a deep breath. "Perhaps I can't be considered powerful in the Outer Sect, but at least no one will pick on me." He looked off into the distance. The mountain breeze lifted his hair up as it blew past, and he suddenly appeared quite elegant.

Originally a down-and-out scholar, he had entered the world of Immortals. When he thought back to the events which had occurred in the preceding days, they seemed almost unreal.

"It's too bad I don't have enough Spirit Stones. And the Spirit Condensation Pills aren't strong enough to be of any use..." His excitement faded into disappointment when he thought about Spirit Stones.

"Fatty, Wang Youcai, and that other headstrong young man," Meng Hao muttered to himself. "The four of us came to the Reliance Sect together. I wonder how they are now." His body moved forward in a flash. Circulating the spiritual energy in his body, he immediately headed toward the North Mountain.

The East, South, West and North Mountains of the Reliance Sect, towered mightily into the sky, covered with pavilions carved from jade. If you looked at the mountains closely, you could see rays of dawn light seeping over their peaks, just beginning to illuminate the surroundings.

White clouds wound around the peaks, concealing parts of the mountains. It really did seem like a place of Immortals.

If you wanted to go from the South Mountain to the North Mountain, but wanted to circumvent the Outer Sect, then you would have to pass along the East or West Mountain. Meng Hao walked along the path passing the East Mountain, two wild chickens in hand.

“I haven’t seen Fatty in about two months, I wonder if he’s lost any weight.” Thinking about Fatty, Meng Hao smiled. Then, his eyes flickered and he stopped walking.

He felt a gentle breeze from up ahead, which carried along with it a thin fog. Amidst the fog walked a young man wearing a luxurious white robe.

He was clearly different than other Outer Sect disciples. His garment was as white as snow and his long hair flowed over his shoulders. Incredibly handsome, almost pretty, he gave off the sense of being perfect in every way, both physically and in temperament. It was as if he had been blessed by Heaven, a darling of nature.

His expression was cool and indifferent, as if nothing were worthy to cause him to change it. Even if the mountains crumbled in front of him, he would remain calm. The fog beneath him roiled and churned.

Behind him walked two youths, who were also handsome, but when compared to the white-robed young man seemed like trash.

“Brother Wang, we’ve heard that in a few years, the Sect will have special training to promote disciples to the Inner Sect. We Junior Brothers would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you in advance.”

“Yes. When Brother Wang entered the Sect, he was already famous. He even aroused the interest of the other three great Sects. But in the end, you decided to stick with the Reliance Sect. What extraordinary magnanimity! Refusal to violate the etiquette of the Sect, ignoring the invitations of the outsiders, reaching the sixth level of Qi condensation in these two years. I even heard one of the Founders say that the promotion training was being held just for Brother Wang.”

“That’s right. Once Brother Wang enters the Inner Sect, it won’t be long before he surpasses Elder Sister Xu and Brother Chen. He’ll be the famous number one disciple of the Reliance Sect.”

“Don’t speak foolishly,” said the man in the white robe, his voice gentle. “Elder Sister Xu is as proud as the heavens, and Brother Chen is wholeheartedly focused on the Dao. They are both fellow disciples whom I admire and respect.” His voice was light and warm, but also manly and pleasant to the ear. This was the number one disciple of the Outer Sect, Wang Tengfei.

“Brother has achieved outstanding mastery of cultivation. With such latent talent and good nature, we Junior Brothers are happy to receive your instruction.”

“Yes, Brother Wang treats everyone kindly, even disciples of the first level of Qi condensation. Everyone in the Sect knows this. I truly admire you.”

The three of them talked, walking slowly toward Meng Hao. Brother Wang, in his white robe, caught sight of the Meng Hao and nodded. He passed them, and the other two people didn’t even give him a single look. As they walked off, Meng Hao glanced back. It was then that he noticed the white-robed man’s feet were not on the ground. Instead, he floated along about seven inches off the ground. Meng Hao gaped in shock.

He realized that he himself couldn’t even compare in any way. He was frail and swarthy, not attractive in any way. Furthermore, he carried two squirming chickens in his hands.

“So that’s Brother Wang Tengfei. He has the ability to float in the air, a skill which comes with the fifth level of Qi condensation.” He had heard rumors about Brother Wang, and knew a lot about him. When Wang Tengfei had entered the Sect, it had caused a big commotion in the Cultivation world in the State of Zhao. No one knew the true price paid by the Reliance Sect to calm the waves of commotion, or why he had decided to stay.

“If I looked like him, I could have placed first in the Imperial examinations. I could have married the Emperor’s daughter.”

Filled with admiration, Meng Hao turned and continued on toward the North Mountain.

He didn't stop the entire way, and by midday, had arrived in the wild mountains bordering the North Mountain. This was where he and Fatty had usually come to chop wood. As soon as he arrived, he heard the sounds of chopping. With a smile, he walked briskly forward, and soon caught sight of Fatty, chopping away at a tree.

He was about to call out a greeting, then stopped and took a step back.

"You stole my wife, and my mantou. I'm gonna chop you to death! I'm gonna bite you to death!" Fatty hadn't lost any weight. In fact, he was a bit fatter. He looked like a round ball.

His eyes were closed, and he stood there howling, surrounded by chopped up pieces of wood. He hacked at the trees, his body twisting. Then, he dropped the ax and fell to sleep.

Deep bite marks could be seen on the long handle of the ax.

Meng Hao was shocked. He had never imagined that in his two months away, Fatty's sleepwalking behavior would become even more severe. Now it wasn't just happening at night, but during the day as well.

He was hesitating as to whether or not to awaken him, when suddenly Fatty's nose twitched and he rubbed his eyes. He gazed about, eyes shining, looking as if he were about to drool.

"I smell wild chicken! Yeah, two of them!" He jumped up and looked around, although he didn't see Meng Hao standing there in the jungle. Then he saw the felled trees around him, and look of gratefulness filled his eyes.

"Ah, Meng Hao, you're so kind," he said emotionally. "You've been gone so long, but you keep coming back secretly to help me chop wood. It's been like this for almost two months. Meng Hao, I Li Furui have never had a better friend in my whole life."

Meng Hao, still standing off in the distance, heard all of this and was amazed. He looked strangely at Fatty, then coughed lightly and stepped forward.

When he appeared, it seemed Fatty could sense him. He turned his head

and caught sight of him, his face full of excitement.

“Meng Hao, you finally show your face,” he said eagerly. “Every time I wake up, I call out for you, but you never appear... ah?” His gaze fell onto the two wild chickens, and his eyes grew wide.

A bit later, fire surrounded the chickens, and a fragrant aroma filled the air. Meng Hao and Fatty sat together, just the same as when they had both been servants. They gobbled down the chicken.

“I haven’t had wild chicken for two months,” said Fatty, his mouth full of chicken. “How come you haven’t shown your face all this time. You always come to help me chop wood, why don’t you bring chickens too?” The joy on his face was clearly apparent as he looked at Meng Hao. It seemed that in his time in the Reliance Sect, he had come to view Meng Hao as a relative.

Meng Hao gave an enigmatic laugh and offered no explanation. Taking a bite of chicken, he looked at Fatty. It was then he noticed that Fatty’s teeth seemed to be longer than before.

“How has your cultivation training been going?” he asked. “Have you been able to sense spiritual energy?”

“Don’t bring it up,” he said with a deep sigh. “I train every night, but the strange thing is, I haven’t been able to sense even a tiny bit of spiritual energy. The only thing that happens is that my teeth grow. I’m worried I might bite my tongue off.” He looked quite depressed.

“Open your mouth,” Meng Hao said suddenly. “Let me see your teeth.” What Meng Hao saw shocked him.

After swallowing a mouthful of chicken, Fatty opened his mouth to reveal a set of long teeth that glittered in the sunlight. As he examined them, Meng Hao’s expression grew even stranger. He almost couldn’t believe it. He could clearly sense spiritual energy fluctuating within Fatty’s teeth.

“How is Fatty doing his training?” Meng Hao thought. “How could the spiritual energy be moving into his teeth? They’ve become Spirit Teeth? If

he keeps training this way, they'll transform into true treasures..." He shook his head in amazement.

Time passed, and soon the sun was about to set. Meng Hao and Fatty chatted just as they used to in the old days. He told Fatty all about the things that had happened in the Outer Sect, with the exception of the copper mirror, of course.

Fatty listened raptly, filled with the desire to reach the first level of Qi condensation and get promoted.

When it came time to leave, Meng Hao gave a Spirit Condensation Pill to Fatty. He swallowed it, and then they parted. Fatty watched Meng Hao disappear into the jungle, looking a bit melancholy, assuring himself that he would apply himself diligently to cultivation training.

He had come by route of the East Mountain, so Meng Hao decided to return by the West Mountain. This was his first time traversing the entirety of the Reliance Sect. By the time dusk fell, he was walking next to a plateau which jutted out from the West Mountain. On the plateau was a massive stone tablet.

The stone tablet was the color of blood, as if it had been painted with gore. Several characters were carved onto the cold stone.

Low Level Public Zone.

There were more characters off to the side, smaller. It explained that the Qi condensation fourth level disciples were prohibited from entering. Only first through third levels could enter the Public Zone.

Looking up, Meng Hao could see the multiple figures interlocked in combat. Many techniques were being used as they fought desperately. Blood sprayed in all directions, and miserable cries rang out. An arm was lopped off, a bag of holding snatched.

As he watched, someone rushed down the mountain, screaming, followed by a huge man with a hideous grin.

"Help me!"

“Who can save you from Cao?!”

Chapter 11: Pill Cultivation Workshop

Outlet

Not too far ahead of him, Meng Hao saw someone screaming for help. Before the person could get off of the plateau, the huge man's flying sword hit him, piercing his neck. He fell twitching to the ground in a shower of blood, rattled out a last breath, then died. The huge man grabbed his victim's bag of holding, then turned and headed back into the Public Zone.

Meng Hao watched the grisly scene unfold, then further observed what was happening on the plateau. The sounds of slaughter drifted along with the wind, which carried the scent of blood and gore into Meng Hao's nostrils.

"You can get rich overnight in this place, but it's also extremely dangerous. For cultivation, for Spirit Stones, people put their lives on the line. It's not really worth it." Meng Hao frowned. He was almost at the pinnacle of the third level of Qi condensation, but what was happening up there was just too chaotic. It would be too easy to be injured, and if he were robbed, it would have a long-lasting effect.

Meng Hao thought about the lack of Spirit Stones in his bag. If he depended on receiving Spirit Stones distributed by the Sect, who knew how many years he would have to wait. Muttering to himself, he looked up at the Cultivation monks on the plateau. They fought fiercely, each and every one having suffered injuries. Suddenly, Meng Hao had a flash of inspiration, an idea.

His idea grew more and more clear, and his eyes began to shine. He turned and hurried off, not to the Immortal's Cave in the South Mountain, but rather down to the Outer Sect. He skirted the main square, and eventually arrived at a building.

The building appeared to be ancient, and was surrounded by the fragrant aroma of medicine. Inscribed above the doorway were characters which read: Pill Cultivation Workshop.

It wasn't his first time coming here. Actually, in his first month after being promoted to the Outer Sect, he had come here once to check out the various medicinal pills which were for sale. That was when he had learned about the Fasting Pills you could buy which would prevent hunger for several days.

The only currency used here was Spirit Stones and Spirit Condensation Pills. Unfortunately, the exchange rate was very unfair. For example, one Spirit Condensation Pill could be traded for ten Fasting Pills. Because of this, few people came here, and it tended to be cold and deserted.

When he arrived, Meng Hao didn't hesitate. It wasn't large inside, and sitting cross-legged right in the middle of the room was a sickly looking middle-aged man. Surrounding him on the interlocking wooden shelves were an assortment of gourd bottles, inscribed upon which were the names of various medicines.

There were Blood Coagulation Pills which could treat external injuries, Skeletal Relaxation Pills to relieve fatigue, Spirit Refreshment Pills to temporarily increase energy and of course Fasting Pills and Appetite Control Pills. There were even Marrow Growth Pills which could treat broken and crushed bones.

There were many types of medicines, but their cost was considerable. For most, the cost of three to ten pills was one Spirit Condensation Pill. To most disciples of the Inner Sect, a Spirit Condensation Pill was worth fighting over, so few were willing to come here and trade them away.

Meng Hao strolled around the Pill Cultivation Workshop muttering to himself, his eyes glittering. Then, he pulled out five Spirit Condensation Pills and exchanged them for a handful of different types of medicines.

It seemed the sickly man didn't see customers like Meng Hao very often. He brightened up immediately, handing over the bottle gourds of medicine.

Placing all the bottles gourds into his bag of holding, Meng Hao left, carefully taking a circuitous route through the mountainous forest back to the Immortal's cave. By the time he arrived, night had fallen.

He sat down cross-legged, looking at the four bottle gourds.

“The sages said, if you do not expend, you will not profit. I’ve paid a lot this time, and I’m going get a lot in return.” Quietly comforting himself in this way, he stood and left the cave, returning shortly with a long tree branch about the thickness of his arm, along with a large pile of leaves.

He pulled a green robe out from Zhao Wugang’s bag of holding and tore the seams apart, then laid it out in front of him. It seemed the right size, so he pulled another robe out, tore the seams, and placed it with the first. He looked down, contented.

Next, he crushed up the leaves to produce a thick sap. Then, he dipped his fingers into the makeshift ink and wrote several large characters onto the cloth in sweeping calligraphy.

He looked at it, feeling quite satisfied, then closed his eyes and began doing Tu Na breathing exercises.

The night passed, and early the next morning, he picked up the tree branch and left the cave hurriedly.

It didn’t take long to reach the plateau, and despite the early hour, there were already a few disciples there locked in battle. The fierceness of the fighting was readily apparent. Ignoring the other Cultivation monks, Meng Hao passed the large stone tablets and walked onto the plateau. His eyes scanned the surroundings, until falling to rest on a boulder which stuck up out of the ground along the border.

He walked over and sat down cross-legged on the boulder, looking every bit the peaceful and harmless scholar. Occasionally some of the others would look at him darkly, whereupon he would reveal some of his cultivation level. Frightened, they left him alone. He decided to wait until more people arrived.

Time passed, and gradually, more and more fellow disciples arrived in the Public Zone. Soon, there were about twenty people. Some of them looked at kind, scholarly Meng Hao, and started to walk toward him. All he had to do was reveal a bit of his cultivation level and they would retreat in shock.

After a while, he figured there were enough people. He slapped his bag of holding, retrieving the cloth strip. He attached it to the tree branch, which he then stabbed into the clay soil next to the boulder. The mountain breeze lifted the cloth up, turning it into a streaming banner. It caught the attention of quite a few of the people nearby, particularly the characters written on it.

“Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet.”

The dark green characters seemed to flash, causing the facial expressions of the nearby Reliance Sect disciples to change. Some seemed astonished, others confused. Some sneered and others frowned.

“Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet? What does that mean?”

“Don’t tell me that guy is a Pill boy sent by the Sect’s Pill Cultivation Workshop?”

“He looks familiar...”

Discussions broke out on the plateau after Meng Hao revealed the flag. But after a bit of time passed, the fighting and robbing resumed. Blood showered and screams rang out.

Meng Hao’s eyes shone as he looked about at the people in the Public Zone. Not far off from him were two Cultivation monks of the second level of Qi condensation, locked in combat, their eyes red. One of them had a shoulder sliced open by his opponent’s flying sword. Blood showered out, and he seemed to be in quite a difficult position.

“Brother, come here,” called out Meng Hao. “Brother, the sages said, it is unwise to risk one’s life when injured. You seem to be bleeding quite profusely from your shoulder. It won’t benefit you to let yourself be killed. I happen to have a Blood Coagulation pill here from the Pill Cultivation Workshop. It can heal all of the sword wounds on your body in less time than it takes to take three breaths.” As Meng Hao made his sales pitch, the two fighting men ignored him and continued to fight. The injured Cultivation monk’s eyes grew redder, and the wound on his shoulder grew worse. Then, blood poured from his chest as his opponent’s flying sword hit him again.

“Look, you got wounded again,” admonished Meng Hao of his first potential customer. “Quick, come buy a Blood Coagulation Pill! Otherwise, you might be defeated. All you have to do is give me one Spirit Stone chunk, and I’ll give you the Blood Coagulation Pill. It’s definitely worth it.”

“Shut up,” roared the injured Cultivation monk, retreating a pace. “The Pill Cultivation Workshop is a rip-off, but they charge one Spirit Stone for five Blood Coagulation Pills. You’re even worse!”

“Ai, it’s not expensive. Your life is much more precious than a Spirit Stone. If you die, then all your Spirit Stones will belong to someone else. All you have to do is buy some of my medicine, and then you’ll have the chance to win and snatch your opponent’s bag of holding. All for the price of a single Spirit Stone chunk. Is that expensive? You’re not buying medicine, you’re buying your own life.” Meng Hao stood. Perhaps his words had affected the wounded Cultivation monk. He struggled backwards a few paces, hesitation showing on his face.

“Dammit,” roared the man’s opponent, pointing his flying sword. “If you mess things up for me, then after I kill this guy I’ll come after you!”

“I’ll buy it!” said the injured man, slapping his bag of holding and producing a Spirit Stone which he shot toward Meng Hao. Meng Hao snatched it out of the air and tossed back a Blood Coagulation Pill. The Cultivation monk grabbed it and placed it onto his shoulder wound. It stopped bleeding almost immediately.

Refreshed, his spirit enlivened, he leaped back into the fight. Suddenly, his opponent retreated, blood flowing out from his wounded chest.

“Brother, Brother,” said Meng Hao, switching customers. “Your opponent bought one of my Blood Coagulation Pills and is now brimming with energy. I think if you don’t buy one as well, you will be facing much peril. I don’t just have Blood Coagulation Pills. I also have Skeletal Relaxation Pills to counter fatigue. I’ll give you one each for two Spirit Stones. That will guarantee you healing and plenty of energy. You’ll definitely be able to achieve victory.”

“You... you...” said the first man indignantly. He didn’t know what to say.

Was this Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet Pill boy here to help him or hurt him? He had just gone from a miserable situation to one of hope. Then, this happened. He attacked more incisively in his indignation. The scene playing out in front of him was exactly the same as when he had bought his medicine.

“If you win, then you’re actually spending someone else’s Spirit Stones on the medicine,” said Meng Hao enticingly, holding the medicinal pills in his hands. “It’s really worth it.”

“I’ll take it,” said the man who had already bought a pill.

“Dammit, give it to me,” said the Cultivation monk who had originally held the upper hand. Despite his hatred of Meng Hao, hearing the other man demand the medicine caused him to grit his teeth and open his mouth.

“I’ll give three Spirit Stone chunks!”

“Brother, he’s offering three chunks. If you can’t top that, I’ll have to give the medicine to him. Take care!”

“I’ll give four chunks!”

“Brother, he’s offering four chunks. Four!”

“Five chunks!”

“Six chunks!”

“Dammit. I give up. Die!” The Cultivation monk who had originally held the upper hand turned on Meng Hao, furious. Originally, the battle had been quite simple. But once Meng Hao got involved, everything got complicated. He flew toward Meng Hao, murderous intent filling his face, clearly aiming to exterminate him.

As he neared, Meng Hao’s visage, meek, scholarly and business-like, suddenly changed, growing somber and stern. Just before the Cultivation monk reached him, he took a step forward, his right palm slapping forward. Spiritual energy poured out with a bang.

The Cultivation monk flew back with a shriek, overwhelmed by the

spiritual energy of Meng Hao's third level of Qi condensation. The attack had struck him unconscious.

Meng Hao snatched his bag of holding, and then his somber, stern expression changed, and he was once again the weak scholar. All the onlookers were shocked.

"Brother, I believe you just offered me six chunks of Spirit Stone," he said shyly, looking a bit embarrassed.

The other Cultivation Monk's face paled, and his body trembled. He stared at Meng Hao with astonishment and terror. How could he ever have imagined that things would turn out this way? How could this apparently weak and feeble person have changed so much? It was almost as if what he had just witnessed was a dream.

Chapter 12: Hello, Elder Sister Xu

The scene, which had attracted the attention of the other nearby Cultivation monks, caused their expressions to change. Many seemed to be at a loss, unsure of exactly what had happened. But now, they all knew that Meng Hao was not someone to provoke.

Even though they didn't know exactly what had happened, Meng Hao's trembling first customer did. His heart pounding madly, he slapped his bag of holding and produced six chunks of Spirit Stone, which he respectfully handed over. He regretted having hesitated in front of the Pill Cultivation Workshop in the past. By fretting over his Spirit Stones at that time, he'd ended up with no medicine. And now, he didn't have any Spirit Stones to go buy anything for himself.

Meng Hao accepted the Spirit Stones, produced a Blood Coagulation pill and Skeletal Relaxation Pill, and gave them to the man.

"Many thanks for your patronage," he said with a wide smile. "Come back again soon." Once again, he looked weak and feeble. But to the Cultivation monk standing in front of him, he was a vicious beast in sheep's clothing. Trembling, the man made his exit.

As he left, Meng Hao decided not to return to his spot on the rock. He grabbed the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet banner and began to stroll about the Public Zone. He stopped next to two battling disciples, sticking the banner into the ground.

"Brother, it seems you're injured," he said, stepping forward. "You also seem somewhat listless. You don't seem to be in the right state to be fighting."

The two disciples stared at him in amazement. Having just seen him knock someone out, they hesitated, and at the same time, both backed up a bit.

"I happen to have some Spirit Refreshment Pills from the Pill Cultivation Workshop. Take one, and you will be completely reinvigorated, your victory guaranteed. Since today is our opening day of business, it only

costs one Spirit Stone chunk. How convenient!” Meng Hao continued to walk forward, his face filled with sincerity.

“I already have some medicinal pills,” said the man he had been giving his sales pitch to. He slapped his grab of holding, and a Spirit Refreshment Pill appeared, which he popped into his mouth.

Upon seeing this, Meng Hao sighed. He had watched his first customer for some time before determining that he had no medicinal pills. With a light cough, he looked at the second man standing in front of him. The man gave a cold harrumph, then produced his own medicinal pill and swallowed it, sighing inwardly.

But Meng Hao wasn't disheartened. He circled back to the boulder, continuing to watch the two of them. As time passed, they seemed to be looking worse and worse off. Soon, it was clear they were out of medicinal pills, and the critical juncture in the fight had arrived. Victory and defeat would be decided.

His spirits risen again, Meng Hao hefted the banner and approached them again.

“Brothers, the moment of life or death has arrived. You don't have any medicinal pills left, but don't worry, I have some right here.

“At this critical juncture, buy one of my Soul Congealing Pills. It will restore your energy in a flash, and even recover your spiritual energy. Brothers, you're not buying a medicinal pill, you're buying spiritual energy. Aiyo, you're injured!” Meng Hao's words distracted the Cultivation monks. A flying sword hit one of them in the arm, sending out a fountain of blood. He retreated backward with a scream.

Meng Hao was even faster than him, following and continuing his speech, looked as weak and scholarly as ever.

“Brother, now is the time. You're bleeding profusely. Quick, buy a Blood Coagulation Pill. If you don't, the danger is just too great.”

“Get out of here!” the man's opponent roared at Meng Hao. He charged his injured opponent.

“Give me a pill,” said the injured Cultivation monk, his face pale. Retreating several paces, he gritted his teeth and pulled out a Spirit Stone. A Blood Coagulation Pill shot from Meng Hao’s hand onto the wound on the man’s arm. The blood flow began to slow. He focused his attention, then leaped back into the fight.

“Aiya, Brother, it seems you’re out of medicinal pills. Look, I have plenty. Now that your opponent bought one, he’s bursting with energy. But you’re injured. Why don’t you buy a Blood Coagulation pill?”

“Oh no, you got slashed again. You must be really tired. Take it slow, and don’t be discouraged. Brother, I still have a Skeletal Relaxation Pill.

“One Spirit Stone for one pill. You should buy pills quickly. The sages said, Spirit Stones have a price, but a life is priceless.” Meng Hao slowly circled them. Sure enough, they were out of medicinal pills, and soon, they began buying. Feeling pressure from each other, they bought quite a few. The battle grew more serious. Their fighting today was more intense than four or five normal battles.

Originally, it had been a fairly simple fight, but with the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet here, things were complicated. With dangerous fighting, comes injury. The two cannot be separated.

Flop. Flop. The two men had finally exhausted every scrap of energy. They dropped to the ground, unconscious, Spirit Stones spent and medicinal pills eaten up. Even their magical items were destroyed in the battle, seemingly together along with their wits. How tragic.

As far as Meng Hao was concerned, he had saved their lives. Or at least one life. Hefting his banner, he once again strolled around the plateau, and once again found two Cultivation monks locked in devastating combat. From the look of it, even if they had healing medicine, it was gone by now. Eyes glistening, he stood the banner up next to the two of them.

“Brothers, your complexions seem bad, and you’ve received some serious injuries. But fear not, I have medicinal pills. One Spirit Stone buys one pill; your recovery is guaranteed.

“How come you aren’t saying anything? Don’t tell me you don’t trust

me? Just now another disciple bought some of my pills. The result for his opponent was death.”

Shortly, each of the men bought a pill, then again, and again, until they had no more Spirit Stones left. After much bitter battling, they ended their fight in a tie, with nothing to show for it except empty bags of holding.

Meng Hao shook his head, picked up the banner and found a new place to do business.

By the time the sun set, Meng Hao had been everywhere in the Public Zone, selling medicinal pills. In the end, wherever he went, the battling would instantly cease, and the participants would leave. Eventually, Meng Hao stared out over an empty Public Zone. Contentedly patting his bag of holding, he left.

It was late at night when he arrived at the Immortal’s Cave. He sat down cross-legged and excitedly began to take inventory of his spoils.

“One chunk, two chunks...” He grew more and more excited as he counted. “Altogether I have fifty-three chunks. I’m rich. This method is much faster than robbing people. It’s also much safer. No need for killing.”

“I don’t have many medicinal pills left, so tomorrow I’ll go to the Pill Cultivation Workshop and buy some more. If I want the business to do well, I should buy out all of this month’s healing medicines. If I don’t have enough Spirit Stones, I’ll just buy as much as I can. The scarcer the pills, the easier they’ll be to sell.”

Meng Hao opened the bag of holding he had taken from the unconscious Cultivation monk. Inside were a few chunks of Spirit Stone, two Spirit Condensation Pills, and a pink-colored medicinal pill.

He held the pill up and examined it. He recognized it as one of the Pill Cultivation Workshop’s Cosmetic Cultivation Pills, an expensive pill. It was worth about ten Spirit Condensation Pills, and could be considered one of the most expensive products available.

“This pill is designed to maintain one’s physical appearance. It would be

a waste for me to use it on myself.” He figured the previous owner must have been trying to ingratiate himself to a female disciple. Not thinking any more on the subject, he put the pill into his bag of holding.

As he was looking down contentedly at all the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills, the main door of the Immortal’s Cave suddenly creaked and began to open. It happened so quickly, Meng Hao had no time to gather up all his spoils.

A woman entered, surrounded by a halo of moonlight. She was beautiful, but cold and expressionless. She wore a long silver robe that made it seem as if she had donned the moon itself.

It was none other than the Reliance Inner Sect’s Elder Sister Xu.

As she entered the Immortal’s Cave, moonlight fell onto the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills which lay in front of Meng Hao. A sliver of astonishment suddenly cut through her cold demeanor.

“Greetings, Elder Sister Xu,” said Meng Hao, scrambling to his feet. His right hand swept up the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills. He stood there, looking embarrassed.

Elder Sister Xu didn’t say anything. She just looked at Meng Hao, nodded, then turned to leave.

Look surprised, Meng Hao followed after her.

“Elder Sister Xu, you took the trouble to come here, why not stay a bit?”

“There’s no need,” she replied coldly. “I’ll be going into meditative seclusion starting tomorrow, and I just wanted to check in on you.” She looked him over, then walked out of the cave.

Meng Hao felt embarrassed, regretting having not collected up the Spirit Stones more quickly. In that case, he would have looked a bit worse off, and perhaps Elder Sister Xu would have been willing to help him out some more.

At the same time, he felt a bit of warmth in his heart. Elder Sister Xu appeared cold and indifferent, but she had come here to see him, which

meant she remembered him. His heart thumping, he slapped his bag of holding and produced the pink-colored medicinal pill.

“I’ve been wanting to thank you, Elder Sister Xu. I saved up quite a bit of Spirit Condensation Pills so that I could trade them for this Cosmetic Cultivation Pill. Please accept it. In my eyes, only you are worthy of such a pill. From the moment I entered the sect, I’ve had a dream, that you would stay young forever, and be eternally beautiful.” Without so much as a wink, he solemnly and respectfully held out the pill.

Elder Sister Xu stopped walking and looked back at him. She glanced silently at the pill in his hand, then accepted it.

“Even though Spirit Condensation Pills are common in the sect, they are only effective up to the fifth level of Qi condensation. We Cultivation monks place much importance on our cultivation foundation. We live in the world of Cultivation, a place where life and death hang in the balance. You can’t be like this in the future. You may be intelligent, but you need to work more on your cultivation.” This was the first time Meng Hao had heard Elder Sister Xu speak so much. As she spoke, he nodded respectfully.

“As long as Elder Sister Xu likes it, I’m willing to trade for it,” he said, lowering his head and blinking. He looked a bit shy.

“This pill... I’ll take it this time, but next time don’t trade your pills like this.” She put the pill away, hesitated for a moment, then pulled out a pink-colored jade pendant which she handed to Meng Hao.

“This is a magical item,” she said. “You need to protect yourself.” She began to walk down the mountain.

“Many thanks, Elder Sister Xu,” said Meng Hao. “Would you allow me to accompany you while you walk? I haven’t seen you for so long, and I have some questions regarding cultivation that I hope you can clear up for me.” He knew that this was an important opportunity. This was the only person he had to rely on, so he needed to get close to her. If he could walk with her through the Outer Sect and be seen by others, perhaps fewer people would be willing to mess with him in the future.

Elder Sister Xu hesitated. She was an indifferent person, and usually didn't say much. She had never spent time with male sect members, and it felt a bit strange to have Meng Hao standing there next to her. She was about to refuse, but after he finished speaking, she thought bashfully of the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill he had given her, and she nodded quietly.

The moon shone down gently on the two of them as they walked.

Just then, at the peak of the North Mountain, a tall old man stood up, clad in a gray robe. As he looked down on the scene, a look of admiration appeared on his face.

“Excellent. This pup Meng Hao isn't bad at all. He truly grasps the correct interpretation of my Reliance Sect. He knows how to find someone to rely on. And he also knows that if he protects his relationship with that person, then he will always have someone to rely on.” This was the same old man who had expressed admiration for Meng Hao on Pill Distribution day. The more he learned about Meng Hao, the more he liked him.

Chapter 13: Manly Cao Yang

Elder Sister Xu was like a tiger pelt, which, when worn while strolling about the Outer Sect, would immediately attract attention. When the Outer Sect disciples saw Elder Sister Xu walking with Meng Hao, strange expressions filled their faces. This was especially true for those who had bought medicines from Meng Hao earlier that day. Hatred blossomed, and then was held back.

As for those with higher level cultivation foundations, they didn't know what had happened on the plateau, but they still recognized Meng Hao, and conjectured that he was not someone to be trifled with.

Actually, Meng Hao didn't know it, but he had become a rather famous person in the Outer Sect in the past two months.

As far as he was concerned, the most important thing was getting through each day. Right now it was night, and not many disciples were about. Not even half of them saw the scene play out.

Realizing that his opportunity was not easy to come by, and shouldn't be lost, Meng Hao prattled on with some of his best humble scholar's words. He led taciturn Elder Sister Xu to the Pill Cultivation Workshop, where the middle-aged man, both nervous and anxious, sold him all of the various healing pills at a very low price. It would take months to restock the amount of pills he took.

They even went to the Treasure Pavilion. When Elder Sister Xu stared ferociously at the shrewd-looking man, his face grew pale. He surreptitiously slipped a Spirit Stone to Meng Hao and indicated that he could exchange the copper mirror at any time. Meng Hao gave a cold harrumph, looking detested, and told the man that he'd lost the mirror ages ago.

The Treasure Pavilion Brother laughed bitterly and apologized. He told him not to worry, that the mirror had been lost in the past and was always found again within two or three years. At the foot of the East Mountain, Meng Hao watched Elder Sister Xu walk off into the distance, surrounded

by moonlight. That was the first time he realized that she was actually incredibly beautiful, like some sort of Immortal goddess.

“Too bad she’s so cold, otherwise I would think about marrying her.” He fantasized idly for a bit, then gave a few dry coughs and headed back to the Immortal’s Cave.

The night passed by uneventfully, and early the next day, as the first rays of dawn appeared, Meng Hao energetically made his way to the plateau.

“I’m just a sliver away from the peak of the third level of Qi condensation. It’s too bad I don’t have the right medicinal pills. Demonic Cores aren’t easy to get, and I would have to go to that black mountain, which is just too dangerous.” As he walked, an idea began to form.

“My goal now is to collect spirit stones. Then, the next time I can get a Demonic Core, I will be able to make a massive leap of progress. If I can get to the fifth level of Qi condensation...” His heart began to thump, and his eyes shined with anticipation.

“Being of the fifth level in the Outer Sect makes you a kind of lord. And most importantly, you can use the Wind Walking technique.” Meng Hao thought back to Brother Wang Tengfei and how he was able to hover seven inches above the ground, and his heart beat even faster.

Soon, the plateau appeared in front of him, and he hurried forward. Looking every bit the humble scholar, he sat down cross-legged on the boulder.

Soon, more and more Cultivation monks appeared, including some who hadn’t been present the day before. The sounds of battle filled the air, along with blood-curdling screams. Meng Hao scanned the scene, trying to pick out his first potential customer of the day. He didn’t notice that in another part of the Public Zone, a man was carefully making his way through the crowd.

The Cultivation monk walked slowly, looking all around. Suddenly, his gaze fell onto Meng Hao, and his body trembled. He stopped walking.

This was Meng Hao’s first customer from the day before. He had

personally witnessed Meng Hao knock down his opponent, then act bashful afterwards. He hadn't expected him to return today, yet there he was.

"How come he's still here? That swindler! His wares are simply too expensive!" The Cultivation monk felt both hatred and fear. Heaving a sigh, he was about to leave, when suddenly his eyes caught sight of a manly disciple entering the Public Zone.

"It's Cao Yang... He's at the peak of the second level, just a step away from the third. His cousin Lu Hong is the number one disciple in the Low-Level Public Zone. Thanks to him, Cao Yang can bully people and use despicable tactics to hurt people when fighting. People get angry, but won't say anything. If it were anyone else, people would have ganged up on him long ago. He didn't show up yesterday, so things went relatively smoothly. Today's going to be good." The Cultivation monk moved a bit closer, convinced that Cao Yang would end up provoking the guy from the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet. Considering he hated both of them, he looked forward eagerly to their misery.

Some of the nearby combatants caught sight of Cao Yang, and their expressions changed. They stepped aside quickly, afraid of incurring the wrath of the manly disciple.

Cao Yang snorted coldly. He was tall, tough and stocky. His cold, hard stare was intimidating, as if the Low Level Public Zone was his own backyard. Other than two or three people who he didn't want to mess with, he looked down on everyone. Frowning, he wondered why he hadn't seen his good friend Zhao Wugang lately. This made his mood sour, so he stalked about looking for a newbie to steal medicinal pills from.

Then, his gaze fell upon Meng Hao, and the big banner sticking up next to him.

At first, he had barely noticed him. But then he saw the gloating Cultivation monk watching on in the distance, and his interest was piqued.

"Go, go, quickly," said the Cultivation monk under his breath. He

suddenly realized that watching the fighting was a lot more interesting than participating in it.

Perhaps his mumblings had some effect, because Cao Yang rolled his eyes and then strode over to Meng Hao. People hurried to get out of his way.

Meng Hao sat on the boulder, looking as resolute as ever, preparing to hawk his medicines. But as he saw Cao Yang approaching, he realized he could not accomplish his goal. He raised his head, feeling a bit of pity.

This man was no stranger to him. He was the violent man he had seen a few days ago. Meng Hao sat there, a weak scholar. Looking bashful and a bit ardent, he said:

“Brother, it’s our second day in business. All pills are in stock, and each one is essential for battle. Would you like to buy some?”

Cao Yang looked him over but was unable to estimate his cultivation foundation. If a person’s Qi condensation level is below the seventh, then unless they intentionally emit spiritual energy, their cultivation foundation will be motionless, and it is impossible to see how powerful they are. Only at the seventh level of Qi condensation does it become visible to others.

Therefore, he had no way to know Meng Hao’s level.

“When I buy things, I don’t need to spend money. Hand over all your medicinal pills and Spirit Stones. If you dally, I’ll snap your neck.” His eyes flashed, and his tone was utterly forceful and domineering. After all, this was the Low-Level Public Zone, and everyone here revered him. His cousin was Lu Hong. As far as he was concerned, Meng Hao was nobody.

Off in the distance, Meng Hao’s first customer watched the proceedings eagerly.

“Beat him to death, beat him to death!” he said quietly. Even he didn’t know which party he was referring to.

“Brother, the sages said, it is not good to steal,” said Meng Hao delicately. “Look, let’s discuss things a bit. I’m running a business here, but I haven’t even opened shop yet. How could I have Spirit Stones already?”

“Sages? On this plateau, I am the sage,” Cao Yang said, feeling even more confident after hearing Meng Hao speak. “If I want to beat you, who will stop me? If I want to cut you to pieces, who would even utter a peep?” Assuming Meng Hao was scared, he laughed heartily and took a step forward. He was very close now, and his eyes radiated insolence.

“Brother, I didn’t do anything to provoke you. Furthermore, I’m not in the Public Zone. Look, I’m outside the borders.” Pulling a long face, Meng Hao stood up on the boulder, trying to speak reasonably.

“You really can talk crap,” said manly Cao Yang impatiently. “If I say you’re inside, then you’re inside.” He stepped past the banner, then swiped his hand at Meng Hao.

“What a bully!” When he saw manly Cao Yang’s hand moving, Meng Hao’s countenance flickered, and he seemed to change into a different person. As Cao Yang moved forward, so did he, and his right palm shot out.

A bang sounded out, then a horrific scream came out of manly Cao Yang’s mouth, followed by a fountain of blood. His body flew back some distance, his face filled with astonishment.

His cultivation level was higher than that of the Cultivation monk Meng Hao had struck yesterday, so he didn’t lose consciousness. But pain wracked his body. Even as he attempted to struggle to his feet, Meng Hao appeared next to him and kicked him viciously into the ground.

“The sages said, if you take things without paying, you’re courting death.

“I told you, I’m running a business, and I haven’t opened shop yet. I don’t have any Spirit Stones.” As he spoke, he continued to ruthlessly trample Cao Yang. The manly man’s shrill, miserable shrieks sounded out over the plateau, punctuating Meng Hao’s each and every word. He protected his head with his hands, rolling about. Soon, footprints covered his green robe.

“I told you I was outside the Public Area, not inside,” said Meng Hao furiously. The manly man’s horrible cries began to grow weak, and it seemed that soon he wouldn’t even have the energy to cry out at all. The

onlooking Cultivation monks all seemed to suck in their breath, looking at Meng Hao raging in all his fury. A few of them had been present the day before, and they started to think that they had struck it lucky.

The one who understood things the most was yesterday's first customer. Looking at manly Cao Yang screaming, and watching Meng Hao's fierce expression as he jumped up and down, he suddenly began to sweat and quiver. The longer he watched, the more he felt that Meng Hao was truly frightening and dangerous.

It appeared that Cao Yang was about to lose consciousness. The shadow of death seemed to float over him. His vision began to grow dim. Then, he rose up his left hand, trembling. In it was a Spirit Stone.

"I... I'll buy some medicine!" he cried. He mustered all his strength to cry out as loud as possible, apparently afraid that Meng Hao wouldn't hear him.

Meng Hao stopped, his foot in mid-air. His fierce expression flickered away, replaced with the innocent scholar's. With a genial smile, he took the Spirit Stone.

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" He helped Cao Yang to his feet, brushing the dusty footprints off his robe.

His manly body trembled, and he stared fearfully at Meng Hao. Looking at him, Cao Yang wanted to leave immediately, to get as far away as possible from the demon in human clothing.

As of now, he was just like the Cultivation monk from yesterday.

"Brother, looking at your current state, I think one medicinal pill will only help you temporarily." He gripped Cao Yang by the shoulders. He seemed to stop in consideration for a moment. "You have a lot of enemies. Why don't you buy some more?"

Chapter 14: Threats

Upon hearing this, Cao Yang's body went stiff. It wasn't just him. Everyone backed up, looking at Meng Hao in dread.

"Buy... buy some more?" said Cao Yang, shaking, his voice weak. Were it not for Meng Hao holding him up, he would have toppled over.

"One pill, one Spirit Stone," said Meng Hao affably. He retrieved several Anti-hemostasis Pills from his bag of holding. "I'm honest with all customers, Brother, please rest at ease. I won't take advantage of your misfortune to raise prices. Just ask any of the Brothers nearby. The Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet's reputation is quite good."

Seeing all the pills, Cao Yang's face paled. And then he looked at the amiable expression on Meng Hao's face and his back grew cold. Heart trembling, he gritted his teeth.

"Brother, you can really tell the good from the bad. These are genuine Pill Cultivation Workshop products." As he spoke, he produced some Blood Coagulation Pills and held them out.

Cao Yang looked at the medicinal pills with a start, then glanced bitterly at Meng Hao's bag of holding. He looked back at Meng Hao's face and saw it filled with care and concern.

Cao Yang wasn't stupid, and he understood Meng Hao's intentions. The blood drained from his heart. But right now his life was the most important thing, and he had no other options. He took out more Spirit Stones from his bag of holding and reluctantly handed them over.

Meng Hao took them with a smile, then placed the medicinal pills into Cao Yang's hand one by one. In a short period of time, the Spirit Stones in Cao Yang's bag of holding had been replaced by a pile of medicinal pills.

Cao Yang's heart bled even more. Looking pained, he trembled.

Then he saw that Meng Hao still held five pills in his hand and a look of shock and desperation filled his face.

"Those other pills should be enough to help you recover. These five are

for after that, to help you maintain your health.” He spoke considerately as he gazed at Cao Yang.

“I don’t have any left, I really don’t,” Cao Yang said, looking at Meng Hao, about to cry.

Meng Hao said nothing, looking as amiable as ever. Cao Yang’s scalp tingled. Gritting his teeth and ignoring his own distress, he pulled out some magic items, including flying swords, magic wands, Spirit Condensation pills and the like.

“I have no spirit stones, only these things,” he said desperately.

“Magic items are also acceptable,” said Meng Hao, taking them and putting them into his bag of holding.

Moments later, Cao Yang, carrying his bundle of medicinal pills, hobbled off, supported by the arms of some fellow disciples.

Meng Hao patted his bag of holding contentedly. It was only morning, and he had already sold out. He decided that it was best to quit while he was ahead, so he collected his flag and told the remaining Cultivators he would see them tomorrow. Conversations broke out as he strode down from the plateau.

Half a month flashed by, during which time, Meng Hao grew to be quite famous among the low-level disciples. They all knew about the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet on the plateau.

Even more talked about was the owner of the shop, who looked like a delicate scholar, but who had an explosive temper. Rumors spread.

One afternoon, Cao Yang walked out of his house, his face pale. Despite his poor complexion, his wounds had healed. The pills he had bought from Meng Hao at an exorbitant price were actually quite effective in helping him to recover.

He had hidden away for the past half month, and today was the first day he had been able to walk around. He looked hesitant at first, but finally walked through the Outer Sect, eventually reaching an area with few buildings. He stopped in front of one of them.

“Cao Yang requests an audience with Elder Brother Lu,” he said, standing outside and clasping his hands in front of him respectfully.

Sitting inside cross-legged was a man of about thirty years of age wearing a green robe. He was not a handsome man, but had an appearance of excessive arrogance. His eyes flickered open, and he looked out at Cao Yang appraisingly.

“What transpired?” he said coolly.

“Well, Elder Brother Lu, I ... I was robbed a few days ago.” Cao Yang blurted it out, feeling nervous. People outside said that Elder Brother Lu was his cousin, but in reality, they were not related. Elder Brother Lu usually meditated in seclusion, and did not really care about Cao Yang at all.

He knew that whenever Cao Yang had some hardship, he would come calling.

Hearing his words, Elder Brother Lu seemed a bit annoyed.

“Who was it that robbed you?” he asked coolly.

“It was an Outer Sect disciple named Meng Hao,” replied Cao Yang.

“Meng Hao?” Elder Brother Lu thought for a moment.

“He’s completely ignorant and incompetent,” said Cao Yang hatefully. “But he opened up a shop on the plateau, hawking medicinal pills to disciples who get injured in battle.”

“Hawking medicinal pills?” said Elder Brother Lu with a frown. His eyes flickered.

“Yeah. Now he’s one of the most famous disciples in the low level. He opened up that shop and then forces people to buy from him. Now, everyone is complaining and ashamed to be associated with him at all. They all despise him. He’s aroused the wrath of heaven and earth! I beg Elder Brother Lu to administer justice.” Anger covered Cao Yang’s face as he thought about his own wretched experience that day.

Actually, Elder Brother Lu didn’t care at all about the things Cao Yang

had just said. And yet, his eyes shone.

“My Cultivation Base has reached this level because of all the low-level disciples I robbed. How come in all my years in the Reliance Sect, I never thought to open a store and hawk medicinal pills...” He sighed and slapped his thigh.

Upon hearing the noise from inside, Cao Yang stared in confusion at the building, not sure what it meant. He didn’t dare to ask. Moments later, Elder Brother Lu sent him away, with no assurance whatsoever that he would aid him in seeking vengeance.

The following morning at dawn, Meng Hao headed toward the plateau carrying his banner. He was in a good mood. He had grown accustomed walking the path to the plateau. When he reached it, he sat down on the boulder.

As soon as he appeared, the faces of the other Cultivators on the plateau grew pale. In the past half month, they had been tormented by Meng Hao until they were completely dispirited. But, if they didn’t come, how could they rob from other disciples? Killing outside of this area was not permitted, so they had no choice but to come. What they usually did was stop fighting as soon as Meng Hao showed up.

But people’s killing spirit would inevitably arise, animosities would be stoked. Even though Meng Hao’s business had slowed, he still made profit.

It is worth mentioning that ever since Meng Hao opened his shop, there were much fewer deaths. He was quick to point this out, and it had become a key feature of his sales pitch.

As usual, Meng Hao looked about for potential customers. He thought to himself that this really wasn’t the best method. The shopkeepers in Yunjie County always had assistants. Even as a new idea was coalescing in his mind, he caught sight of a man in the distance, about thirty years old. He looked extremely arrogant, and in his hand he held a banner which looked just like Meng Hao’s. Written on the banner were several large characters.

Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet Number 2.

This was Lu Hong, the number one disciple in the lower level. His Cultivation Base was similar to Meng Hao's, just a hair away from the peak of the third level. Meng Hao glanced at him, then paid him no attention. Of course there would always be imitators in business, although Meng Hao wasn't too pleased with the name on the banner.

The other Cultivators on the plateau looked at each other for a moment, then went back to their fighting. About an hour later, Meng Hao caught sight of two combatants. He hurried over and planted his banner next to them. At the same time, Lu Hong hurried over and planted his banner.

As the two banners were planted, the combatants dripped with cold sweat. As far as they were concerned, the people standing there were very powerful. Normally, one would be enough to make them uncomfortable, but here were two, standing there staring.

"Brother, buying a medicinal pill will ensure your safety," said Meng Hao hurriedly. "One Spirit Stone per pill. I treat all customers fairly."

"Buy Lu's pills, they're just as effective," said Lu Hong from the other side. He looked at the two, murderous intent flashing briefly in his eyes.

The two combatants trembled down to their guts, having lost any desire to fight. They produced Spirit Stones and handed them over to Lu Hong, then raced off. Meng Hao frowned. This was clearly robbery, and if things went on like this, the Public Zone would soon be empty. That wasn't his desire.

By afternoon, Meng Hao's business had dropped significantly. Other than an order in the morning, he sold nothing at all. Lu Hong, who didn't care a bit about right and wrong, forced people to buy. If they didn't buy, then he attacked them. Soon, the plateau was completely empty.

Lu Hong looked down at the dozen or so Spirit Stones he had acquired. He looked cool and indifferent on the outside, but inside he burned with excitement.

"This really is a good business. If I had thought of this before, I wouldn't have been made fun of for robbing so many lower level disciples. If only that Meng Hao weren't here, I'm sick of him." He had not come because of

Cao Yang, of course, but rather to imitate Meng Hao's business model. Now that he had a taste of it, he wanted to have the monopoly. He looked murderously at Meng Hao.

"I'll practice a few more days," he thought, "then kill him."

The next day, thanks to Lu Hong's powerful reputation as the number one disciple in the low level, few people showed up in the Public Zone. Those who did show up were ones who hadn't been present the day before. They had no choice but to buy medicinal pills. Meng Hao wasn't willing to do business like Lu Hong, so he didn't get a single order.

The more Lu Hong looked at Meng Hao, the more his murderous intentions grew. By evening of the third day, when Meng Hao was making his silent exit, he heard Lu Hong's arrogant voice from behind him. The few people present all heard.

"If I see your banner tomorrow, I'll cripple your Cultivation Base."

Meng Hao stopped for a moment. He said nothing, but his eyes filled with cold power. He stalked off, returning to the Immortal's cave.

"You're the one who copied me," said Meng Hao, his eyes fierce. "Then you stole my business, like a turtledove stealing the nest of a magpie. Then you say you'll cripple my Cultivation Base!" Thinking of the murder in Lu Hong's eyes, Meng Hao pushed open the stone door of the second room in the Immortal's cave. Instantly, thick spiritual energy began to pour out. Meng Hao sat down cross-legged.

He absorbed the several months' worth of accumulated spiritual energy. As dawn approached, he opened his flashing eyes. He had experienced a breakthrough. No longer was he a hair away from the peak, he was at the peak of the third level. Now he was just a step from the fourth.

But that step was not an easy one. The higher one's Cultivation Base, the more difficult it was to progress, especially to the fifth and seventh levels. Those levels were often bottlenecks, extremely difficult. Meng Hao frowned, gritted his teeth, and forced himself to open the bag of holding and take out all of the Spirit Condensation Pills he had earned recently. Then he used copper mirror's mystical ability along with all his valuable

Spirit Stones to duplicate even more Spirit Condensation Pills.

Spirit Condensation Pills were of limited use, but with a large amount, there would be some effect. Each time he used this method, though, its efficacy would be reduced.

“If I don’t cripple him first, he will destroy me tomorrow.” Without hesitation, he popped the pills into his mouth.

The spiritual energy in his body lacked a bit, so as the huge amount of Spirit Condensation Pills dissolved, his body began to shake. He felt his Cultivation Base erupt like a flood. His mind hummed, and his consciousness faded a bit. When things grew clear, his eyes glittered. And yet, he still had not reached the fourth level of Qi Condensation. He ground his teeth. With no other choice, he duplicated more Spirit Condensation Pills and swallowed them.

Once, twice, three times. His mind vibrated violently, as if it were being smashed by turbulent waves. Then there was a bang, and his eyes grew blurry.

Massive amounts of filth oozed out from his pores, and as it did, Meng Hao’s vision slowly grew clearer, his body cleaner. After about an hour, his eyes glittered dazzlingly, and he was completely clear-headed.

“The fourth level of Qi Condensation!” He felt his Cultivation Base roiling like a massive river. As he circulated it, it sounded like a roaring tempest, astonishing and frightening.

His expression calm, he retrieved five flying swords from his bag of holding, spoils from the past half month. They were all products of the Treasure Pavilion, standard issue, and all looked exactly the same.

There were some other magical items which he had procured. He heaved a deep sigh, then closed his eyes and began to meditate, awaiting daybreak.

“After entering the sect and beginning my cultivation practice, I had no choice... but to rob some people to improve my Cultivation Base. But I don’t want to hurt too many people. Thus, I came up with the idea of

running a business. But now my business has been stolen away, and I've been threatened with crippling... That is pushing things too far!"

When dawn broke, Meng Hao opened his eyes and left the Immortal's cave. He washed, then headed straight for the plateau.

Chapter 15: Decisive Attack

Dawn. The plateau. Considering the months of Meng Hao's hawking, and days of Lu Gong's domineering, there were few Cultivation monks present, especially this early in the morning. There were only two or three, sitting there cross-legged.

When Meng Hao arrived, they opened their eyes, and each of them sighed inwardly, wondering when things would return to the way they had been before.

Moments later, they gaped in astonishment. Meng Hao didn't enter the plateau, but instead sat outside, cross-legged, eyes closed. He remained there, unmoving.

This strange sight left them astonished. They looked at each other, then seemed to remember something, whereupon they began to gloat.

Time passed, and soon it was late into the morning. More and more people arrived on the plateau, and every single one noticed Meng Hao and his unusual behavior. People began to make guesses about what was going on. Everyone was so intrigued that none of them fought.

"Could it be that Brother Lu's words really worked? Meng Hao is too scared, so he doesn't dare to hawk goods?"

"It must be. Brother Lu is the number one disciple in the low level. If he tells you to beat it, then you have no choice but to beat it."

"Who would have thought that this guy was so scared for his own skin? All he can do is bully people lower than him. Look at how arrogant he is. He thinks that just because he didn't bring his crappy banner, Brother Lu will let him off the hook." Many of them were like this. They wouldn't complain when being robbed by someone powerful. But if someone who looked weak and kind took their items through business, they would complain endlessly.

Lu Hong had been in power for quite a while. From his first vicious attack long ago, all the way to today, when he forced people to do business

with him, everyone was helpless. And yet, they had no choice but to deal with the situation. In fact, many of them believed he had become a bit gentler recently.

Meng Hao hadn't been in the sect for very long, and was neither very powerful nor arrogant. So even though his business was conducted gently, everyone complained relentlessly.

Meng Hao heard all of their talking, but his expression remained as neutral as always. Of course, his reason for sitting in meditation outside the Public Zone was not because he didn't want to enter, but rather because his cultivation foundation was now at the fourth level of Qi condensation, and he couldn't enter even if he wanted to.

In the midst of all the discussion, someone appeared at the bottom of the mountain. He wore a green robe, looked to be about thirty years old, and wore an incredibly arrogant expression. It was Lu Hong, slowly approaching, his hands clasped behind his back.

As soon as he appeared, Meng Hao's eyes opened, and they shone brilliantly. Everyone watched as he stood up and slapped his bag of holding. A small white sword appeared. The sword aura glistened, pressing down with a cold pressure. Meng Hao charged forward, and the sword aura made a beeline for Lu Hong.

As soon as this happened, a buzz of conversation rose. Everyone was amazed at Meng Hao's lack of fear... Was he really going to cause trouble for the number one low-level disciple Lu Hong?

"He... he's going to battle Lu Hong!"

"They were going to fight sooner or later. Meng Hao injured Cao Yang and Lu Hong wrecked his business. This battle was unavoidable. I just never imagined Meng Hao would dare to attack like this. I think he doesn't know his own limitations."

"Brother Lu has been at the third level for years. Meng Hao will definitely lose."

Even as Meng Hao dashed forward, Lu Hong's eyes glittered. He'd

already planned to take Meng Hao's head if he saw him today. And now, his opponent had dared to take the initiative. It was actually helpful. He snorted, and his body seemed to turn into a rainbow as he sped toward Meng Hao. His right hand slapped his bag of holding and a purple-colored flying sword appeared.

When the flying sword appeared, it was accompanied by a piercing whistle, and it radiated a golden purple color with a diameter of approximately 30 meters.

"It's Brother Lu's Purple Yang sword!"

"It is! I heard he was awarded the Purple Yang sword by the Sect for some special service he did. It's mystically sharp."

Two people, one mountain. At the foot of the mountain, they charged each other.

Amidst a reverberating roar, Lu Hong's expression changed and blood spurted from his mouth. He flew back several paces, staring at Meng Hao in shock.

"Fourth level of Qi condensation!"

Meng Hao looked a bit embarrassed. He had just entered the fourth level of Qi condensation, and his grasp of it was not firm. He could not release its full power.

He had made a simple attack, filled with ferocity. But cracks were already visible on his flying sword. His opponent's weapon was magically sharp, and had damaged his own weapon.

Even though Meng Hao didn't have much experience in fighting, in his half year or so hunting for wild beasts in the mountains, his reaction speed had grown. Furthermore, during his days on the plateau, he had observed many battles. Even as Lu Hong retreated backward, he moved forward, slapping his bag of holding. Another flying sword appeared next to the cracked sword. The two sword auras merged together and shot toward Lu Hong.

As he sped forward, Meng Hao's fingers flickered and tongues of flame

congealed all around him. Three paces away, a Flame Serpent appeared, as thick as his arm, about half a meter long. It twisted in the air, then emitted a roar and shot toward Lu Hong.

Looking shocked, Lu Hong spit blood from his mouth and moved backwards anxiously. His eyes flashed with anger. He knew that because he had some magical items, and Meng Hao had just entered the fourth level, the outcome of this battle was not certain. But if he could exterminate Meng Hao, it would build his prestige.

Murderous intent flickered in his eyes. His fingers danced, whereupon a globe of glistening, radiant water appeared in his hands. He threw it out, whereupon it exploded, transforming into countless Water Arrows, which then shot toward the Flame Serpent.

His fingers moved again, and the Purple Yang sword slammed into Meng Hao's two flying swords. A booming sound rang out like iron being crushed. Meng Hao's two flying swords crumbled into pieces, whereupon the Purple Yang sword followed the Water Arrows toward the Flame Serpent.

With an echoing roar, the Flame Serpent disappeared into a cloud of dust. The Water Arrows became a mist and the Purple Yang sword returned to Lu Hong. Its golden-purple aura did not shine quite as brightly, and a crack had appeared on its blade, but it was still as sharp as ever.

"With a fourth level Qi condensation like that, and no good weapon, killing you isn't going to be hard. How many times can you use your Flame Serpent art like that, considering you aren't at the fifth level?" In his heart, Lu Hong was worried about his flying sword, but outside, he put on a broad smile. He didn't take a single step back.

"Your sword might be incredibly sharp, but let's see how many times you can use it. Speaking of flying swords... I have some more, too. And as for the fifth level of Qi condensation, with all the medicinal pills Elder Sister Xu gives me, it won't be long before I break through." He showed no expression on his face, but inside Meng Hao was very nervous. This was his first real battle, after all. He slapped his bag of holding, and three more

flying swords appeared. They shot toward Lu Hong.

Lu Hong looked worried for a moment, but he didn't hesitate for long. He roared, and then Meng Hao's three flying swords met his Purple Yang sword.

Bang bang bang! The three swords shattered. And yet, the Purple Yang sword's aura had diminished by at least half. More cracks had appeared on its surface, and Lu Hong looked incredibly worried.

Before he could do anything, though, Meng Hao nonchalantly slapped his bag of holding one more time, and three more whizzing flying swords appeared. He waved his arm, and another Flame Serpent congealed into being. The onlookers were all shocked.

"Meng Hao... He... He's put Brother Lu in a really tight spot. He's actually at the fourth level of Qi condensation!"

"He didn't enter the sect very long ago, and he's already at the fourth level of Qi condensation. He's definitely at the fourth level, look at how he's dealing with Brother Lu. But, how did his cultivation training go so quickly? What did Elder Sister Xu give him to help him so much? Dammit, if I had someone like that to rely on, then maybe I would be able to progress so quickly in my cultivation." The crowd buzzed, their faces filling with powerful jealousy.

Lu Hong's face changed again, and he retreated, grinding his teeth. His fingers flickered again, and another Water Globe appeared. He'd never imagined that his opponent would have so many magical items.

A boom resounded as Meng Hao's three flying swords broke to pieces, along with the Flame Serpent. The Purple Yang sword's aura had now grown dark. But what shocked Lu Hong the most was Meng Hao's expressionless face as he suddenly produced three more flying swords. Another explosion rang out as the three swords broke apart. But then, the Purple Yang sword let out a plaintive cry, then crumbled to pieces.

Lu Hong's eyes went wide, and he staggered backward, spitting out gobs of blood. He glared at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao showed no emotion whatsoever, but inside he was extremely nervous. Every single flying sword was equal to a Spirit Stone. He waved his right hand, and yet another Flame Serpent appeared, roaring and twisting through the air around him. It flew toward Lu Hong.

Meng Hao shot toward the retreating Lu Hong like a rainbow, accompanied by the Flame Serpent. Yet another flying sword appeared, and in an instant, it was a meter away from Lu Hong, its sword aura glittering with death.

“You forced me to do it!” shouted Lu Hong, his hair in disarray, his clothes spattered with blood. From the day he had entered the sect until now, he had never been in such a bad situation. His eyes burned. With a growl, he tore open his robe, revealing a jadeite bottle gourd hanging from his neck. He poured into it all of the spiritual energy he could muster.

The jadeite bottle gourd began to glow brightly, and a droning sound filled the air. In the air in front of Lu Hong, the image of a massive bottle gourd appeared, many times larger than the one hanging from his neck. It was about half the size of a person.

Actually, Lu Hong’s cultivation foundation was not strong enough to fully activate the bottle ground. The flickering image seemed as if it could dissipate at any moment. Before it could finish coalescing, Lu Hong spit out a mouthful of blood and retreated backwards again, his face deathly pale. And yet he still glared at Meng Hao with frenzied, murderous anger.

Even though the bottle gourd was not complete, the pressurized spiritual energy inside caused Meng Hao’s expression to suddenly change. Then, the illusory bottle gourd emitted a thunderous roar and a thick, green beam shot from its mouth, slamming through the Flame Serpent and inundating Meng Hao.

“This is a magical item given to me by Brother Wang Tengfei. It can be used when one reaches the fourth level of Qi condensation. But you’re just looking to die, Meng Hao, so you’ve forced me to use it early, and I’ve had to pay the price. You’re definitely dead this time.” Lu Hong started to let out a wild laugh, and yet the laugh could not leave his mouth; he felt as

shocked as if he had been struck by lightning. He stared in astonishment.

The green beam slammed into Meng Hao, pushing him back about ten meters. However, it was blocked by a pink shield which surrounded Meng Hao's body. When the green beam dissipated, so did the pink shield. It shrank into a pink jade pendant which Meng Hao held in his hand. Cracks covered its surface.

He gripped the jade pendant, cold sweat dripping down his back, fear lingering in his heart. If he hadn't taken out the jade pendant Elder Sister Xu had given him, he would have been destroyed by the fearsome power of the bottle gourd.

"What magical item is that!?" Meng Hao looked at the jadeite gourd bottle hanging from Lu Hong's neck, who was clearly severely injured. He leaped forward and snatched the gourd bottle, immediately putting it into his bag of holding.

"That was given to me by Brother Wang Tengfei! If you dare to steal it, you will have to deal with Brother Wang's wrath!" Lu Hong's countenance sank, and he began to tremble. He was filled with astonishment, never having imagined that the bottle gourd would be ineffective against this opponent.

"The Sect rules state that if you take something into your hand, it is yours," said Meng Hao. He hesitated for a moment, but then decided that the bottle gourd was too powerful. He wouldn't give it back. Enmity had been created which would be difficult to abate. Hatred in his heart, he stared coldly at Lu Hong.

"This isn't the Public Zone," said Lu Hong, his eyes filled with despair and fear. Raising his voice so everyone could hear, he said, "If you dare to kill me, it will be a violation of sect rules!"

"I, Meng Hao, will not violate Sect rules. However, you said yesterday that you would cripple my cultivation foundation. So today, I will do the same to you." Looking completely calm, he raised his hand and sent a flying sword piercing into the Qi passages of Lu Hong's dantian, smashing his cultivation foundation. Then he stood there amidst Lu Hong's

miserable screams, casting fear and awe across the entire plateau.

Chapter 16: Come here!

The faces of the surrounding Cultivation monks grew pale. Meng Hao's attack was both decisive and also filled with a ferocious hatred that he himself didn't even notice. This sort of thing was actually becoming a trend.

In the eyes of the onlookers, Meng Hao was now the number one person of the plateau. Perhaps in the entire Outer Sect, he was now one of the highest figures.

Many of the Cultivation monks thought back to the past half month. With a cultivation foundation so high, Meng Hao could have robbed and taken at will. True, the customers of his shop weren't happy, but he did treat them mildly. People now began to look at him with awe.

There was no fighting on the plateau that day. After Meng Hao left, the news of Lu Hong's cultivation foundation being broken spread like the wind. The fact that he had mentioned Wang Tengfei's name was especially talked about, and caused the news to spread even faster. By nightfall, everyone in the Outer Sect had heard about what happened, and by this point everyone knew who Meng Hao was.

The East Mountain, covered with wisps of colorful clouds, was the Reliance Sect's tallest mountain and also the Inner Sect's base of activity. It had more spiritual energy than the other mountains, and was where Sect Leader He Luohua went for meditative seclusion.

Back in the heyday of the Reliance Sect, the four peaks had been fully occupied by the Inner Sect. Disciples of the seventh level of Qi condensation had abounded. Now, only the East Mountain was occupied, by disciples Xu and Chen, whereas the other peaks were abandoned.

On the East Mountain there was an Immortal's Cave which was much larger than Meng Hao's. It was actually the finest Immortal's Cave in the entire Outer Reliance Sect, rivaling even the dwelling-places of the Inner Sect disciples.

Inside was a Spirit Spring that was anything but dried up. It gurgled out

dense, fragrant spiritual energy.

Of course, among all the disciples of the Reliance Outer Sect, the only one qualified to occupy such a place was the blessed Wang Tengfei.

He sat cross-legged in his white robe, his face placid, looking at Lu Hong kneeling in front of him. Lu Hong's face was pale-white, and his body trembled. His cultivation foundation had already been destroyed by Meng Hao.

"...I beg Brother Wang to administer justice," he said with bated breath. "He's beyond cunning, more than you could imagine. He's going to flee the sect." Every time Lu Hong saw Brother Wang, he could not help but feel that the other man was perfect, beyond ordinary. That feeling had grown stronger and stronger over the past two years in which Wang Tengfei's cultivation foundation grew more and more powerful.

"If he flees," said Brother Wang after a while, resplendent in his perfection, "it will be a violation of Sect rules, and I will send some people to kill him." He wore an amiable smile which would cause anyone to like him, and spoke with a lightness that caused him to seem even nobler.

Lu Hong had nothing more to say. He kowtowed, his face filled with entreaty, his body trembling uncontrollably.

"Very well," said Wang Tengfei. "His methods are too vicious. An example should be made. I shall prevail upon Brother Shangguan and make a trip over there, although I will be careful not to offend Elder Sister Xu. Meng Hao shall cripple his own cultivation foundation, distribute his treasures and sever an arm and a leg. That shall be his apology. Good enough?" He spoke as if he held sway over every single matter within the Reliance Sect, as if with a single word, he could take command over Meng Hao's cultivation foundation as well as his arms and legs. His smile was as amiable as ever, perfect and without flaw.

"My profound thanks. This fellow... he's just filled with viciousness..." Lu Hong ground his teeth, his heart filled with enmity.

"Then I shall expel him from the sect," said Wang Tengfei coolly, as if he were talking about an incredibly insignificant matter. "He can go off into

the wilds, and things will take their natural course.”

At that same moment, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in the Immortal's Cave in the South Mountain, looking at the jadeite bottle gourd in his hands with a dark expression. Having broken through the fourth level of Qi condensation, then fighting that battle, he had consumed almost all of his spiritual energy. There was nearly none left. At least he had obtained the magical gourd.

It seemed as though everything had gone smoothly since his entrance into the Reliance Sect, but actually, it was mostly because of his quick wit and foresight. If it had been anyone other than him, he would most likely have put his life in danger on his first Pill Distribution Day.

Later, he acquired the protection of the copper mirror and its mysterious power. Shortly after that, Brother Chen began to lust after his Immortal's Cave. If he hadn't died, Meng Hao's situation would have been bleak, and he would have lost control of all of his belongings. That was the first time he had killed someone.

If he hadn't started doing business with his shop, he wouldn't have been able to arrive where he was now. But the wind that seemed to propel him from behind also held concealed within it hardships that he was unaware of.

Everything that had happened was like the thunder of an approaching storm. Meng Hao looked down quietly at the jadeite bottle gourd, thinking about the number one disciple in the Outer Sect, blessed Wang Tengfei. Thinking of him in all his perfection, Meng Hao felt as if the pressure of an entire mountain had come to rest on him. He almost couldn't breathe.

He wanted to flee, but he knew that he was no servant, but a sect disciple. Fleeing was a violation of Sect rules. That would arouse the notice of the sect elders, and he would surely lose his life.

“If I'd known earlier that Lu Hong had Wang Tengfei backing him...” muttered Meng Hao. Moments later, unswerving determination filled his eyes.

“I would do the same thing. If I didn't attack him, he would have killed

me. I didn't force him, he forced me. The grudge would have built either way. Unless I had run into Cao Yang earlier and been willing to let him rob me, things would have ended up this way. Even if it came down to killing, I couldn't prevent people from coveting my business." His eyes flashed as he looked gloomily around the Immortal's Cave.

"It's too bad Elder Sister Xu is meditating in seclusion..." The first thing he had done after crippling Lu Hong's cultivation foundation was to go looking for her. But he had been informed at the Inner Sect that parties in seclusion were not to be disturbed.

"This jadeite bottle gourd..." It was incredibly powerful, so much so that when he tested it out with his cultivation foundation, it exploded out with a might that sent his heart thumping. He could only imagine how it could help him. Maybe now he would finally be able to break through to the fifth level of Qi condensation. The strange thing was that the gourd bottle could not be placed in his bag of holding, but rather had to be hung on his body. Sadly, he had no more Spirit Stones. He had used all of them to break through the third level of Qi condensation. Otherwise he would try to make a copy of the gourd bottle.

"This sect is not of the mortal world. It's easy to lose one's life here. If I can prevent disaster by handing over the gourd bottle, maybe I should just do it..." He did not wish to do so, but it seemed he had no other choice. Even as he wrestled with these thoughts, a sinister voice drifted in from the dark night, past the sealed door of the Immortal's Cave.

"I am Shangguan Song, here to assist Brother Wang in meting out justice. Meng Hao, please come out of the Immortal's cave and kowtow to me."

The dark voice seemed to fill the cave with icy cold shadow. Meng Hao's eyes glittered, and he lifted his head. He didn't look the least bit surprised; he had anticipated that someone would come looking for him.

Meng Hao was silent for a moment, then slowly said, "It's late at night, not a convenient time. Brother, if you have something to say, just say it."

"How haughty," said the voice, clearly displeased. A cold snort rang out.

Meng Hao said nothing, maintaining his silence.

“If you won’t open the door, very well. I shall convey Brother Wang’s instructions. Meng Hao, disciple of the Inner Sect, has not focused wholeheartedly on cultivation. He has caused disturbances in the Low-Level Public Zone, arousing mass complaints from fellow disciples, and has used vicious methods on others. However, he is young, so these offenses cannot be considered worthy of the death penalty. Hand over your treasures, cripple your cultivation foundation and leave the sect. Henceforth, you are not a disciple of the Reliance Sect.” As Meng Hao listened to the sinister voice, his face grew somber. Then, when he heard the final words, it filled with indignation.

“Brother Wang’s decrees are not according to Sect rules,” said Meng Hao defiantly.

“Brother Wang’s word are the Sect rules,” said the person outside, indifferent to Meng Hao’s interruption. “The following day is Pill Distribution Day. You will kowtow to Lu Hong and apologize, then await your punishment.” With that, the man flicked his sleeve, turned and left.

Meng Hao sat in silent contemplation. Time passed, and dawn approached. His eyes were bloodshot. He could not figure out what to do. His opponent obviously wanted the jadeite bottle gourd, and to see him dead. Out of supposed to mercy, he would cripple his cultivation foundation, sever an arm and a leg, and then expel him from the sect into the wild mountains. If that happened, he would truly be hopeless.

“What should I do...” he said, fists clenched, eyes red. He suddenly felt completely weak and helpless. This was the first time he truly wished he were more powerful. If he were more powerful, he wouldn’t be bullied like this. He thought some more.

“Don’t tell me my only option is to flee...” His eyes filling with determination, he lifted up his head and walked out of the Immortal’s cave. But even as he walked out, he stopped in his tracks, hesitating.

“No, this isn’t right...” He lowered his head for a moment in thought, then turned back into the Immortal’s Cave, where he sat down cross-

legged.

The following morning, Meng Hao opened his bloodshot eyes. He had not practiced any Tu Na breathing, but had spent the whole night in contemplation. But his cultivation foundation was simply too low. He couldn't think of any method other than fleeing the Reliance Sect. But surely his opponent had considered that he would do that. Fleeing was the same as death, and then he would be remembered as a traitor.

Bells rang out in the distance. Pill Distribution Day had arrived. Meng Hao knew that even if he tried to hide away in the Immortal's Cave, catastrophe would still befall him.

"The law of the jungle. All of my problems are because my cultivation foundation is too low. A true man doesn't just take the suffering, he does something about it." He gave a small sigh. He had been pushed to the brink, and had no room to maneuver. He calmed himself, then straightened out his clothing. He looked around the Immortal's cave, then opened the main door and stared out at the blue sky and the emerald sea of trees.

Some time passed, and then he stepped forward. He had only taken a few steps when he noticed a person walk out from the jungle behind him, staring at him coldly.

"You didn't flee. So you aren't stupid after all." Meng Hao recognized the person's voice: it was Shangguan Song. It turned out he had stayed behind.

Meng Hao had seen him before. He was one of the disciples walking with Wang Tengfei that day by the East Mountain. His grandfather was one of the sect elders. He clearly had stayed behind to see if Meng Hao would flee. If he had, he would have been branded a traitor, and would have forfeited his life.

Meng Hao turned and headed toward the Outer Sect.

Shangguan Song laughed coldly, his eyes filled with ridicule. Actually, he had left the previous night, to go call on his grandfather Cultivator Shangguan. Even had Meng Hao chosen to flee in the night, he would have been entrapped, and suffered a horrible death.

Shangguan Song followed Meng Hao the entire way. When they arrived at the Outer Sect, other disciples caught sight, one by one, and many different expressions filled their faces. Regardless, it appeared as if all had expected this, and none seemed to take pity on Meng Hao. Most actually jeered at him.

Soon, he arrived at the Outer Sect's square. The dragon-carved pillars glowed brightly, and disciples were everywhere. Off in the distance, he saw white-robed Wang Tengfei, surrounded by a crowd of disciples.

The sun shone down on his white robe, making it shine like snow, and his long hair trailed past his shoulders. He looked perfect, flawless, like an Immortal being from a painting. His bearing made people want to get to know him. He was like the darling of heaven.

He chatted amiably with the disciples around him, friendly with everyone, regardless of their cultivation foundation. He would nod, giving tips about cultivation, causing everyone to treat him with utmost respect.

The female disciples all seemed to be infatuated with him. They looked as if they needed to be at his side, as if his each and every action could drive them crazy.

Even the sect elders on the tall platform gazed down on him fondly and with admiration.

Wherever Wang Tengfei went, he became the center of attention. His good looks, his gentleness, his perfection, melded together into a dazzling glow which burned Meng Hao's eyes. He clenched his fists tightly.

As all the disciples arrived, and as the Pill Distribution concluded, gentle and cordial Wang Tengfei didn't even look once at Meng Hao. He knew Meng Hao was watching him, but it meant no more to him than if a cricket were looking at him. He wouldn't stoop so low as to return his gaze.

When everything concluded, and the dragon-carved pillars grew dark, Wang Tengfei's gentle voice filled the air.

"Come here!"

It was a simple sentence, but the instant it rang out, everyone looked at Wang Tengfei, watching as his gaze fell onto Meng Hao.

Chapter 17: I shall rely on myself!

Meng Hao stood there stiffly, staring at Wang Tengfei. He could suddenly feel the gaze of all the disciples who stood in the square. The Cultivation monks standing next to him moved away, creating an open area around Meng Hao.

A feeling of aloneness filled his heart, as if the world itself were about to forsake him. It was as if Wang Tengfei's single utterance had pushed him over the edge of existence.

No one spoke a word. The Outer Sect disciples just looked at Meng Hao. Wang Tengfei was too famous. His words reverberated in everyone's hearts.

No one was surprised at what was happening; news of yesterday's events had spread, and many people had already guessed what would happen this day.

The sect elders remained unmoving upon the high platform, gazing down at Meng Hao.

"Sect rules state that what you take belongs to you," said Meng Hao, forcing the words out one word at a time. He knew that compared to Wang Tengfei, his voice was laughably weak and small, and that he might be attacked. But, he still spoke up.

He knew that if he took out the jadeite gourd bottle, handed it over to Wang Tengfei, and made some tearful entreaties, then Wang Tengfei couldn't reject his apology. Not in front of all these people. He might exact some punishments, but would leave Meng Hao with his cultivation foundation.

Maybe if he begged and kowtowed, admitted that he was in the wrong, accepted the humiliation and even insult himself, then he would be completely out of danger.

But Meng Hao would never do such a thing! Call him stupid and crazy, but he would never do it!

Even though he knew he was facing a dire calamity, he would never beg. He would never humiliate himself, would never crawl on the ground and plead. Never!

This was his spirit, his integrity. Some things in the world are more important than life or death, and that noble, unbendable, unbreakable spirit is dignity!

That was why he had spoken first, one word at a time. Even though his opponent was the mountain-like Wang Tengfei. Even though he faced dire calamity. Even though the whole world was against him. Even though he was alone, with no one to rely on. Despite all this... he still had his dignity. He lifted his head up and spoke.

This, was Meng Hao!

His words seemed to galvanize all the energy in his body. Death? What is death? So what if I haven't even lived to see 17! You can humiliate me, you can cripple my cultivation. But you can never make me yield! You can never break my spirit!

His voice had rung out in the silence, clear and distinct, yet filled with a certain loneliness. As he spoke, his bitterness was plain, but perhaps only Meng Hao himself could understand it. His hands clenched into fists. No one else could sense it, but along with Wang Tengfei's words had come an invisible attack that attempted to force Meng Hao to collapse.

His body seemed as if it were about to disintegrate, his bones about to shatter. He felt a massive pressure trying to force him to kneel. His body shook, but he gritted his teeth and stood there, ignoring the pain in his bones.

"That treasure is mine," said Wang Tengfei with a friendly smile. "It belongs to whomever I give it to. I didn't give it to you, so you have no right to take it." His words seemed friendly, but were filled with menace, clear for everyone to hear. Smiling, he walked forward, raising his hand and waving a finger in Meng Hao's direction.

Winds surged in the square, screaming around in circles, causing the robes of the disciples to flap. Meng Hao stood still, as if the air in the

square had become death itself and held him bound. He couldn't move a muscle. Suddenly, a pink jade pendant flew out from within his clothes and hovered in front of him. A pink shield appeared, covering Meng Hao protectively.

Wang Tengfei looked as affable as ever. His movements seemed completely casual, and as he took a second step, his finger waved a second time.

A bang resounded as the second finger movement stopped. The shield warped and twisted, flickering three times, then shattered in a deafening explosion. The jade pendant in front of him, the gift given to him by Elder Sister Xu, broke into pieces. Blood poured out of Meng Hao's mouth, and the pressure on him increased. He gritted his teeth, unwavering. He stood there, trembling, unwilling to yield.

An exceedingly dark look filled his eyes, and he clenched his fists harder. His fingernails dug deep into the flesh of his palms.

With his usual kind smile, Wang Tengfei took a third step forward, landing directly in front of Meng Hao. He waved his finger a third time, and a force like a giant invisible hand ripped open Meng Hao's clothing, revealing the jadeite gourd bottle hanging around his neck. The invisible hand snatched the gourd bottle, wrenching it away from Meng Hao and depositing it in Wang Tengfei's palm.

Meng Hao's face grew pale, and he coughed out a mouthful of blood. His body trembled, yet he couldn't move. Veins of blood appeared in his eyes, and his hands were clenched incredibly tight. He felt the pain of his fingernails digging deep into his flesh. Blood began to drip out from between his fingers and drop to the ground.

"Cripple your cultivation foundation. Sever an arm and a leg. Leave the sect." Wang Tengfei continued to smile, his warm voice reverberating across the square. He extended a finger for the fourth time, pointing toward Meng Hao's chest.

Meng Hao glared back at Wang Tengfei. This entire time, he had only spoken once, never opening his mouth to say a second sentence. He did

not scream or roar, but remained silent. More veins of blood appeared in his eyes and he clenched his fists even tighter. Because of the power he exerted, his fingernails snapped, lodged in his flesh. Blood dripped like rain.

Everything grew silent as people watched, their faces filled with derision. Their ridicule seemed to cut him away from the world, pushing him away until he was placed outside of everything.

And yet he still would not submit! What was a bit of physical pain?

Just as Wang Tengfei's finger was about to fall again, a sound rang out from a distant mountain peak and a gentle power appeared next to Meng Hao, blocking the crippling finger.

A bang rang out. Wang Tengfei flicked his wide sleeve and glanced to the side. An old man stood there, wearing a long gray robe. He had some mottled brown marks on his face, and though quite tall and big, didn't appear to be very mighty. This was the same person who had admired Meng Hao on the two previous occasions.

"You've taken the treasure back," said the old man. "Let the matter drop." With a frown, he looked at Meng Hao standing there silently, blood dripping from his fists. He sighed, then looked back at Wang Tengfei.

"Since it is Grand Elder Ouyang interceding, the younger generation will give in." Wang Tengfei smiled, looking indifferent. During the entire time, he had only spoken to Meng Hao twice. Sunlight shone down on him, illuminating his elegant figure, his long hair, his perfect demeanor. As far as he was concerned, Meng Hao didn't even match up to an insect. As of this moment, he'd already placed Meng Hao out of his mind.

Meng Hao, covered in blood, was like a bug standing up against an elephant, who could crush him with a single step.

To Wang Tengfei, the things that had just happened were nothing. It was not that he felt contempt toward Meng Hao. He just didn't care about him in the least bit. With a smile, he walked back into the crowd, chatting indifferently, as if nothing had happened. He began to give pointers to lower level disciples, emanating cordiality.

All the female disciples seemed obsessed with him. The other Cultivation monks viewed him with utmost respect. Everyone ignored Meng Hao, as if they had already forgotten about his existence.

Meng Hao was like the antithesis of Wang Tengfei. Covered in blood, his clothing in shreds, he cut a truly sorry figure.

Meng Hao could sense what Wang Tengfei thought of him. It wasn't scorn, it was disregard. As Wang Tengfei left, Meng Hao felt a bit more relaxed, although his body hurt so bad it seemed he might collapse. Gritting his teeth, he saluted Grand Elder Ouyang with cupped hands.

Without another word, Meng Hao coughed up another mouthful of blood, clenched his jaw, and slowly walked off. His feet felt as if they would disintegrate at any moment. He was soaked with sweat, and every step caused heart-rending pain. Looking like a whipped dog, he slowly disappeared into the distance.

As he walked off, Grand Elder Ouyang seemed to be about to say something, but decided not to, and simply watched him depart.

Meng Hao returned to the Immortal's Cave, and the instant the main door closed, he collapsed to the ground, unconscious. Wang Tengfei was already at the peak of the sixth level. There was no way for Meng Hao to compare to him. By refusing to give in and kneel, he had of course received internal injuries.

He was comatose for two full days, after which he finally opened his eyes, his body wracked with pain. It was difficult to move, but he lurched up into a sitting position. When he touched the ground with his hands, they burned painfully, as if the skin had been stripped off of them. Gasping huskily, he sat there quietly in the middle of the Immortal's Cave.

After some time passed, he looked down at his hands. Ten broken fingernails protruded from the skin of his palms. After two days of coma, scabs had formed over the fingernails, but in his struggle to sit up, they had broken, and now blood oozed out.

Meng Hao looked at his hands, expressionless. After a while, he began to dig the broken fingernails out of his skin, one by one. Blood flowed out of

his mangled palms, dripping to the ground and filling the cave with the scent of gore.

Through the entire process, Meng Hao's facial expression did not change. It was as if the hands didn't belong to him. There was a certain ruthlessness within him that was now clearly visible.

He looked down at the ten bloody fingernails. After a while, he collected them together and placed them next to the stone bed in the room. He planned to look at them every day as a reminder of the humiliation he had endured.

The day would come when that humiliation would be repaid in double!

He hadn't spoken for a long time, but now he opened his mouth: "As for me, I shall rely on myself!" The hoarse voice almost didn't sound like his own.

Chapter 18: Fatty of the Outer Sect

Time flashed by. Meng Hao didn't even take half a step outside of the Immortal's Cave. He didn't want to go out and didn't want to see anyone. He could never forget how Wang Tengfei had turned the whole world against him. He sat cross-legged, staring at the fingernails, encrusted with dried blood. His previous numbed expression changed into wrath, then somberness. Finally one day, the main door of the Immortal's cave creaked open, and moonlight poured in.

Elder Sister Xu stood there in the doorway, wreathed in moonlight which obscured her features.

Meng Hao didn't say anything, and neither did she. Time passed. Finally, she said, "I ended my seclusion just yesterday."

Meng Hao stood, saluting her with clasped hands.

"Wang Tengfei has an important background," she continued mildly. "He's not from the State of Zhao, and his Cultivation Base is at the sixth level of Qi Condensation. The Sect elders have already selected him to be promoted to the Inner Sect. You... you must not provoke him."

"Junior Brother understands," said Meng Hao with a smile. His expression appeared to have returned to its usual state, as if he had abandoned any brooding about what had happened. Although, deep in his eyes existed something which had never before appeared in his sixteen years of life.

It was a cold light he kept buried so deeply that only he could sense it. Others were clueless.

"However," said Elder Sister Xu, "if he causes any more trouble for you, all you have to do is smash this slip, and I will sense it, even if I'm meditating in seclusion." A moment passed, and then she waved her hand. A purple-colored jade slip appeared next to him.

"Of the four people I brought to the mountain that day, you are the first to be promoted to the Outer Sect. Your companion who you worked with

in the North Servant's Quarter is being promoted today. Tomorrow at dawn, he will arrive in the Outer Sect to register." With that, she turned to leave.

"Many thanks, Elder Sister. I have a question I wish to ask," he said. "I was hoping Elder Sister could explain. My Cultivation Base is at the fourth level of Qi Condensation. Considering my latent talent, how long do you think it will take to reach the seventh level?"

"To reach the fourth level of Qi Condensation in less than a year seems to indicate that you have had quite a bit of luck in your cultivation practice. You don't need to explain the details, and I won't ask. Without such luck, it might take ten years at the fastest. At a slower rate, it could take half of a sixty-year cycle. The fourth, sixth and eight levels are all bottlenecks, especially the sixth. Without a bit of luck, it's difficult to break through to the seventh level."

"It's like that for everyone?"

"For everyone." Then she was gone. Meng Hao sat down cross-legged, a sharp look shining in his eye.

An hour later, he stood up and left the Immortal's Cave for the first time in days. The seasons were changing again, and it seemed autumn would arrive within a few days. The leaves were beginning to change color and wind drifted across the mountains and valleys.

Beneath the bright moon, Meng Hao made his way along a small path into the wild mountains. Everything was quiet, and the only thing that could be heard was the gentle rustle of falling leaves as Meng Hao made his way toward the North Mountain.

He wanted to go see Fatty. In the entire Sect, he was his only friend.

The Northern Servant's Quarter was quiet this late at night. As he approached, he heard the sounds of snoring filling the air, a special kind of snore that he had grown accustomed to in his four months as a servant.

The horse-faced young man who presided over the Northern Servants' Quarter sat cross-legged on the large boulder. He suddenly opened his

eyes and look at Meng Hao, surprised for a moment. Then he rose to his feet and saluted Meng Hao with clasped hands.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng.” Rumors about Meng Hao had abounded recently, and of course the horse-faced young man had heard them.

“No need for the formality, Elder Brother,” said Meng Hao. “I’m here to see an old friend.” Taking a look at the young man’s Cultivation Base, Meng Hao could see that it was the third level of Qi Condensation. It appeared as if it had been stuck there for several years.

Elder Brother Horse-Face nodded. After Meng Hao stepped foot into the Servants’ Quarter, he sat back down cross-legged, a strange expression on his face. With a silent sigh, he closed his eyes again.

Meng Hao walked into the courtyard and found the East Seventh House. As he approached, the sounds of Fatty’s snores filled the air. As soon as he entered, a strange expression filled his face, and the antsy feeling that had filled his heart recently began to dissipate.

Fatty lay there on his back, snoring away. The other bed in the room had been pushed away from the wall, forming a small gap.

There in the gap, sound asleep, was the big man who called himself Grandpa Tiger. Even though he was asleep, his face seemed contorted in fear, as if he had encountered something terrifying in his dreams.

His wooden bed was covered with a multitude of bite marks. In some places, it was chewed all the way through, so much so that it seemed it might fall apart. The wooden table was long gone, and Meng Hao imagined that it must have been completely eaten up. Even the walls had bite marks on them. In sharp contrast, Fatty’s bed remained bite-less.

The big man in the corner shivered, then let out a miserable cry. He was obviously in the throes of a nightmare. Given his emaciated appearance, and the dark circles under his eyes, it seemed he hadn’t been sleeping well lately. Meng Hao could only imagine the wretched circumstances that had tormented him into this state.

It seemed his cry had awakened Fatty, who sat up looking annoyed, then saw Meng Hao. He suddenly grew excited.

“Wild chicken! Did you bring any wild chicken?”

Meng Hao looked at him, unable to hold back his smile.

He was as round as ever, apparently having not lost even a bit of weight. In fact, he looked a bit fatter. His teeth had also grown longer, by about half. When he talked, they glittered brightly.

“I heard you reached the first level of Qi Condensation,” he said with a smile, “so I came to see you. I was in such a hurry that I didn’t have time to grab a chicken.” He sat down on the bed next to Fatty, examining his teeth.

Fatty, proud of his Cultivation Base, began to talk. Meng Hao didn’t say much, instead listening to Fatty’s garrulous chatter. Soon, the moon began to fall and the sun began to rise. The wounds in Meng Hao’s heart also began to dissipate, leaving behind only scars. The fingernails in the Immortal’s Cave and the cold look in his eyes fused together within Meng Hao to create a more mature look.

At dawn, Meng Hao left with Fatty. Grandpa Tiger watched them go, tears streaming down his face. His tears moved Fatty, and before they could leave the courtyard, he ran back, gave him a hug, and then said something. Whatever he said caused the big man’s face to grow pale and his body to tremble.

“What did you say to him?” asked Meng Hao, when they were just about to reach the Outer Sect.

“He’s a good person. After you left the Servants’ Quarter, he became my friend. He was so upset at me leaving, I just couldn’t take it.” A pained expression appeared on his face. “I told him that I would definitely come back often to visit. He looks tough,” continued Fatty emotionally. “But he’s actually a bit of a coward. He always has nightmares when he sleeps. Poor guy.”

Meng Hao didn’t say anything, nor did he ask anything else about the

man. As the two of them walked through the Outer Sect, people looked at Meng Hao, their expressions strange, as if measuring him up.

“Eh? Seems you really roiled things up in the Outer Sect, Meng Hao,” said Fatty excitedly. “Everyone’s looking at you.” In his mind, he figured that few people would be willing to bully him since he had Meng Hao at his back.

Meng Hao smiled but didn’t explain. When they were almost to the Treasure Pavilion, Meng Hao stopped walking. He watched Fatty approach the building.

In the amount of time it took for half an incense stick to burn, Fatty returned excitedly. In his hand he carried a short sword, covered with a layer of fish-like scales. It wasn’t the least bit sharp, but instead rough.

“See the treasure I got, Meng Hao? It’s truly a great treasure.” He waved the sword in the air, and Meng Hao was just about to ask what it could possibly be used for when Fatty opened his mouth and started filing at his teeth with it. A scraping sound could be heard, and Meng Hao wasn’t sure whether he should laugh or cry.

“It’s great!” said Fatty, sounding more and more excited. “My teeth keep getting longer, and I’m constantly looking for things to file them down. But whatever I find always breaks within a few days. I can use this treasure to file them down forever!”

Meng Hao showed Fatty around the Outer Sect. He even offered to let him stay with him in the Immortal’s Cave, but Fatty refused. He had been living with a roommate for too long, and had been looking forward to having his own place in the Outer Sect. No matter what Meng Hao said, he refused. When they arrived at his house, he looked completely content.

Meng Hao didn’t push him. When the night was deep, he returned to the Immortal’s Cave and sat down cross-legged.

Time flew, and soon three months had passed. Two months before, Meng Hao had re-opened his stall by the Low-Level Public Zone. Perhaps because of what had happened with Wang Tengfei, no one caused any problems for him, and soon, his business picked up again.

Soon, he added magic items to his offerings, and business grew even more. But now, there was more than one person in the company. At his side was a fat teenager who constantly filed his teeth with a flying sword. He had a good sense for business, and constantly hawked wares in the Public Zone. Soon, he was the main force in the business. With the cooperation of Meng Hao, who could not enter himself, they made quite a tidy profit.

One day, when winter had fallen and snowflakes filled the air, Meng Hao sat cross-legged at the edge of the plateau, meditating. Suddenly, Fatty let out a yelp and grabbed a person, dragging him toward Meng Hao.

“Meng Hao, Meng Hao, look who it is!”

Chapter 19: The Wind Stirs Again

Meng Hao opened his eyes and saw Fatty excitedly dragging over a young man. Short, sallow and emaciated, he made quite the contrast to pale, plump Fatty.

Meng Hao recognized him. He was one of the members of the group who had been brought to the Reliance Sect that day and taken along with Wang Youcai to a Servants' Quarters on a different Mountain.

At that time, he had looked strong and good-natured, but now he seemed gloomy and in poor circumstances. However, there was a certain hardness in his eyes that spoke of some unforgettable experiences in the Outer Reliance Sect.

Furthermore, he dared to enter the Public zone at only the first level of Qi condensation.

"Greetings, Brother Meng," said the young man, looking a bit excited. But then it disappeared and he made an extremely respectful salute to Meng Hao with hands clasped.

"Did you just enter the Sect?" Meng Hao asked him, thinking back with a sigh to his own first days.

"It's been about a month," he said, lowering his head.

"What about Wang Youcai?"

"He died," said the young man, a numb expression on his face. After the words left his mouth, a look of grief appeared in his eyes.

"Wang Youcai died?" said Fatty in shock. Meng Hao maintained his silence.

"In the Servants' Quarter, we were responsible for drawing water," he explained. "Big Bro Youcai thought I was too young, so he helped me a lot. Once on a mountain road, a powerful gust of wind hit us and knocked him off a cliff. I looked for his body for two months, but could only find some broken bones... he must have been eaten by wild animals."

A look of sorrow appeared on Fatty's face and Meng Hao let out a sigh. The four of them arrived at the same time, but in less than a year, one was already dead. Meng Hao felt bad, and even worse when he remembered that Uncle Wang the carpenter only had one son.

"Little Tiger, you stick with us. With Meng Hao around, no one will dare bully you." Fatty clapped the young man emotionally on the shoulder.

"No, that's okay, I'm... I'm fine." The young man seemed to hesitate, and Meng Hao could tell that he was thinking about something. In the end, he shook his head and refused Fatty's offer. He saluted them with clasped hands, then made his way away from the plateau.

"What's the deal with him?" asked Fatty, still in shock.

"Everyone has secrets," said Meng Hao slowly. "Perhaps he made some lucky break that he doesn't want to talk about. Otherwise, why would he come here at only the first level of Qi condensation?" Meng Hao seemed to be lost in thought as he watched the young man disappear into the distance.

"Even if Little Tiger has some secret, we could still find it out on our own if we wanted to. He's looking down on us." Fatty brooded. He had an open and straightforward personality, and didn't think in scheming ways. To offer someone something in good faith and be turned down this way obviously raised his indignation.

In the lower regions of the Nanshan continent, winter was short and passed almost in an instant. The warmth of Spring arrived, and the flowers bloomed. It was once again April. A year had passed since Meng Hao had arrived at the Reliance Sect.

With Fatty's help, he had accumulated quite a bit of Spirit Stones from the Low-Level Public Zone, and even more medicinal pills and magical items. He would often go into the wild mountains to hunt for demonic beasts. He even roamed close to the black mountain in his search, but always came up empty-handed. The roars which emanated from the black mountain region grew more and more intense, so Meng Hao didn't dare to enter.

He had one third-level Demonic Core which he duplicated multiple times with the copper mirror. Eventually, his cultivation foundation reached the middle of the fourth level. But then, his progress virtually ceased. No matter how many medicinal pills he consumed, the only thing it did was make his spiritual energy a bit more pure.

He had reached a bottle neck and could not break through to the fifth level and his much desired Wind Walking technique.

With Meng Hao's help, Fatty reached the second level of Qi condensation, which left him feeling quite awe-inspiring.

That April, all Outer Sect disciples higher than the fifth level, as well as Elder Sister Xu and Brother Chen, were dispatched out of the sect. They each returned with two or three youths who possessed latent talent, who then became servants.

Once per year. That was the Sect rule. This was the only way to ensure the continuation of the Sect's existence.

The spring wind blew across the land, taking the cold along with it. Heat returned. Soon, autumn arrived, and then it was October. During this period of time, two important things happened in the Reliance Sect. The first was related to one of the Sect's Grand Elders. Other than the Sect leader, who everyone said had already formed a Core, there were two other Grand Elders who had perfected their foundations. One of them, who had exhausted his allotted years, passed away while meditating, at around one-hundred and fifty years of age. When Meng Hao caught wind of this, he asked around and confirmed that it had not been Grand Elder Ouyang.

When Cultivation monks perfect their foundation, it expands their longevity to one hundred and fifty years. It seems like a long time, but it is actually a very intense period. If the monk cannot form a Core, then in later years, they can only sit in meditation, shrivelling up, their Qi and blood slowly dissipating.

However, by forming a Core, longevity could be doubled to three hundred years.

Because of the Grand Elder's death in meditation, the Reliance Sect was

put in a bad position. It was already in a weak standing in the State of Zhao and was now in even more danger. Suddenly, Cultivation monks from other sects began to appear near the Reliance Sect's territory.

They seemed to be searching for something, so the Reliance Sect set up defensive tactical spells around the mountain. Everything within several thousand meters fell under the protection of the spells. Figurative storm clouds appeared, dark and thick, pressing down on the entire Sect.

Most disciples in the Outer Sect had their guesses. Some of them were more informed than others, and received bits and pieces of information. News spread, and soon, a rumor developed that the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao was stirring because of Founder Reliance, who had been missing for four hundred years.

As for the details, none of the Outer Sect disciples was sure.

During this time, Meng Hao's cultivation foundation continued to be stuck in the middle of the fourth level. Nothing he did seemed to have any effect, and finally he grew to accept that he was stuck in a bottleneck.

He sat cross-legged in the Immortal's cave, frowning. "Elder Sister Xu told me that breaking through from the peak of the fourth level into the fifth level would involve a bottleneck. But why did my bottleneck come early... Is it really because I consumed too many Demonic Cores?

"If that's the case, I need some medicinal pills especially designed for breaking through bottlenecks. Or perhaps I need some high level Demonic Cores." He had quite a collection of Spirit Stones, but lacked the appropriate medicinal pills. He was confident that if he just had the right medicinal pills, he could break through to the fifth level of Qi condensation.

The anxiety in the Reliance Sect was palpable. Many disciples walked to and fro with troubled hearts, trying their best to hide their feelings. Meng Hao felt the nervousness too, and of course he was dealing with his own critical matter.

The only person who seemed happy was Fatty. He was even more enthusiastic about their stall on the Plateau than Meng Hao. Even when

Meng Hao didn't feel like going, he would take the banner there himself to do business.

Three days later, bells sounded out. Pill Distribution Day had come. When Meng Hao and Fatty arrived at the square, Meng Hao caught sight of a golden-robed old man on the platform, behind whom stood Elder Sister Xu and Brother Chen.

Seeing this, Meng Hao's heart began to thump, and a fire burned in his eyes.

"In the past year and a half, Master Uncle Shangguan has only appeared three times, and each time was an Individual Pill Distribution. My cultivation foundation has been stuck in a bottleneck in the fourth level for almost a year. If there is a high level medicinal pill..." Other Outer Sect disciples had similar thoughts, and soon, conversations buzzed in the air. Of course, some disciples were thinking, "Please, don't give it to me."

This was especially so because after what Meng Hao did with his pill that time, the Sect had made a new rule that prohibited gifting Individual Distribution medicinal pills to members of the Inner Sect.

"It's... it's a Dry Spirit Pill!"

"It is! A Dry Spirit Pill. There was one distributed last year, and now one more. Only one per year! That just shows how valuable it is!"

"If I can get my hands on it, I will definitely have a breakthrough in my cultivation foundation."

A louder buzz of excited talk arose as the gold-robed old man lifted the glowing, purple pill into the air.

When the pill appeared, Meng Hao's eyes shone with a brilliant intensity. He had never before wanted a medicinal pill so much. In his eyes, it was not a medicinal pill, but his only hope of breaking through to the fifth level of Qi condensation.

He had been a member of the Sect for a while now, so he was now familiar with the various disciples. The Inner Sect had Elder Sister Xu and Brother Chen, both of whom were at the seventh level of Qi condensation.

Rumor had it they would break through to the next level very soon.

Under them was Wang Tengfei, who was stuck at the peak of the sixth level of Qi condensation. To him, a Dry Spirit pill would be of little use. Besides him, there was one more disciple of the sixth level, the number two disciple Han Zong.

Meng Hao had seen him twice, and had pegged him to be wildly arrogant, someone who considered everyone to be beneath his notice. If he were here, he wouldn't even cast a glance at the Dry Spirit Pill, just to show that he had a collection of even better medicinal pills.

As for disciples of the fifth level of Qi condensation, there were four in the Outer Sect and they could be considered to be lords. They were rarely seen, as they often secluded themselves in meditation or traveled about the wild mountains in training.

There weren't many disciples of the fourth level. Including Meng Hao, there were seven in total. As for those under the fourth level, they might as well be bugs.

"Very well, quiet down everyone." Wizen Mr. Shangguan's voice reverberated out, as astonishingly powerful and suppressive as ever. However, compared to last year, Meng Hao was not as powerfully affected. Instead, his eyes shone with determination.

"In the past two years in which I have presided over Pill Distribution, I usually prefer to select a new disciple. The reason is that if we can continue to get new disciples, our sect will flourish." He smiled, and his eyes swept over the crowd. Just when it seemed he had made his decision, his eyes fell upon Fatty, who stood next to Meng Hao filing away at his teeth with a sword. His face looked indifferent.

He looked as round as a ball, and anyone who for the first time caught sight of him filing his teeth would find it hard pressed to decide whether to laugh or cry. Mr. Shangguan stared in amazement, then laughed.

"Never mind," he said. "I'm going to give the pill to you." He waved his right hand, and a purple light flickered as the Dry Spirit Pill shot toward Fatty. With a look of shock, he instinctively caught it, looking as if he

didn't even know what had just happened. Then, his expression changed and he let out a yelp. His body began to tremble as the blood drained from his face. He looked like he was about to cry.

“This... Me... Crap, why did it have to be me?”

Chapter 20: Entering the Black Mountain

In a split second, everyone in the entire square suddenly began to stare at Fatty, making him feel as if a cold wind were creeping down his back. His body quivered, and he looked pitifully at Meng Hao, a weak smile on his face.

“Meng Hao, save me...” He wanted to throw the pill away, but for some reason it wouldn’t leave his hand. He was so frightened that as people began to surround them, his teeth chattered.

As the lights faded, he trembled violently. Then the lights were gone, and the restrictive spell released. Before Fatty could say anything, Meng Hao sent out a booming flash of his fourth level cultivation foundation, then grabbed Fatty by his robe and charged away.

“Give me the pill,” Meng Hao said in a low voice. “You go back to the Immortal’s Cave and hide!” Without hesitation, Meng Hao tossed him the cave’s jade slip. Fatty threw him the Dry Spirit Pill as if it were a hot potato.

Meng Hao’s body flashed as he sped forward with Fatty in tow. Behind him, howling and roaring sounds arose as ten or more people raced in hot pursuit.

“Dammit, it’s Meng Hao. You can’t escape!”

“Hand over the Dry Spirit Pill. As a fellow disciple, I’ll show some mercy and not kill you. Otherwise, you’ll have a tough time escaping death!”

Meng Hao didn’t stop for even a second. After emerging from the edge of the Outer Sect, he tossed Fatty away from him. Fatty was a matter-of-fact kind of person, but he wasn’t stupid. As soon as he landed on his feet, he let out a miserable shriek.

“Pill thief!” he screamed, clutching the jade slip close to him as he ran off, trying not to look suspicious. He dashed toward the Immortal’s Cave at top speed.

Hearing this, the pursuers ignored him and continued after Meng Hao.

“Flee to the ends of the earth if you want, you won’t survive the next 24 hours!”

“You’re of the fourth level, and you still don’t give me the pill!?” Among the ten or more pursuers, most were of the fourth level of Qi condensation, and only two were of the fifth level. The rest were of the third level, obviously hoping to be able to take advantage of the situation.

Cold sword auras whistled behind Meng Hao as over ten flying swords descended toward him like rain. But he was determined to keep the Dry Spirit Pill, and refused to toss it away.

“I just have to endure for twenty-four hours, then the pill will be mine,” he said, determination shining in his eyes. “Then, I will finally be able to break through to the fifth level of Qi condensation.” He increased his speed. After spending so much time hunting for Demonic beasts in the wild mountains, his top speed was not inferior. And he was much more familiar with the mountainous regions than most other fellow disciples. Thus, upon leaving the Outer Sect, he raced towards mountains.

Glancing behind at the approaching sword auras, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding to produce a medicinal pill which he immediately swallowed. Then he sent his own flying swords shooting backwards.

Bang, bang, bang. Several trees were hit by the powerful flying swords and exploded into pieces, which flew about everywhere. Some smacked painfully into Meng Hao. Absorbing momentum from the explosion, he shot away several meters.

Before he could land on the ground, four Flame Serpents and three Water Globes shot toward him. Two of the Flame Serpents were almost six meters long and as thick as a person, and emitted an intense heat which caused some of the nearby trees to catch fire. Those would be the work of the fifth level disciples, who were also the fastest of the bunch. Their feet didn’t even touch the ground as they flew toward him like the wind. Savage looks filled their faces. Actually, they didn’t hold the slightest bit of compassion even for each other. As far as they were concerned, the only competition involved were the two of them. Meng Hao didn’t count for

anything.

Without hesitation, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding again. Two flying swords appeared and rotated around him, then came to rest beneath his feet. Then they shot forward, carrying him nearly ten meters before he lost his balance and fell off. The short movement enabled him to evade the Flame Serpents and gain some distance. Furious howls reverberated in the air behind him.

This was a technique Meng Hao had come up with himself. It wouldn't work for long, only a few seconds, but at least it helped him to gain a bit of advantage on the two fifth-level Cultivation monks.

"If I were of the fifth level of Qi condensation," Meng Hao thought to himself, "I would have the Wind Walking technique. Then I could stay on the flying sword for a lot longer, and I could get away more easily. Sadly, this isn't really flying..." Even more than ever, he desired to reach the fifth level of Qi condensation. Not looking back, he sped along. Actually, the path he chose was not random. The instant the Dry Spirit Pill had landed in Fatty's hands, his mind had been racing at top speed.

He had picked the wild mountains because his destination was none other than the black mountain inhabited by Demonic beasts. After thinking about it for some time, he had decided that his best advantage was the copper mirror. With the mirror, he would still have a good chance of surviving the area even though it was dangerous, and contained that ominous roaring beast. This was especially true if people followed him in.

"If these guys chase me into the black mountain, then I'll be forced to kill them." A harsh expression appeared on his face. He had been a part of the Reliance Sect for over a year now and was no longer the weak scholar he had once been. He didn't appear to have changed much on the outside. He was a bit taller, and his skin was as swarthy as ever. But his heart was filled with decisiveness.

This was especially so after the matter with Wang Tengfei. He knew that he could only rely on himself. The only true path was to become stronger. In the world of Cultivation, the law of the jungle prevails. One must

conduct oneself with caution and decisiveness.

They pursued him relentlessly. Sword auras glittered. Before long, the two fifth-level Cultivation monks had almost caught up with him, their eyes filled with murder. Just now, Meng Hao had evaded their attack using a single special move. Other than Wang Tengfei and Han Zong, they were like high lords in the Outer Sect, so they found this particularly humiliating.

They had attacked at the same time, and yet Meng Hao had still managed to evade, which they both found hard to accept. Now, they wanted even more than ever to slay him. As far as his sword-riding technique, they didn't give it a second thought. Any Cultivation monk of the fourth level could do that. But considering their cultivation foundation, doing so would be a waste of spiritual energy, even if it gave some extra speed. Seeing Meng Hao use the technique, they sneered. Using such tactics would sap his spiritual energy sooner rather than later.

"Let's see you escape this time!" they shouted, glancing at each other. One of them suddenly shot forward like a huge bird. In mid-air, he waved his hand, and two massive, roaring Flame Serpents shot down toward Meng Hao.

The other man continued to pursue Meng Hao. The two of them created a pincer attack, one in the air and one on the ground, ready to seal Meng Hao's fate in death.

"You still won't accept death!" grinned one of them hideously, his murderous intent filling the air.

Meng Hao's expression didn't change. He gave a cold snort. He'd dared to snatch the Dry Spirit Pill, so of course he had some special techniques prepared. He slapped his bag of hold, and flicked his sleeve. Six flying swords appeared. Their sword auras interlocked and then whizzed outward, away from Meng Hao.

"BOOM!"

Meng Hao let out a small shout of pain which reverberated into the

mountains. When the two pursuing Cultivation monks heard the explosion, they gasped with astonishment, unsure of what had happened to produce such a sound.

Amidst the thunderous roar, Meng Hao spat out a mouthful of blood. And yet, his body shot away into the distance. Behind him, the effects of the attack dissipated, and the Flame Serpents collapsed with blood-curdling shrieks. The fifth-level Cultivation monks had no choice but to retreat a few paces, covered in dirt, their faces filled with disbelief.

“Dammit. What ruthlessness! He detonated six flying swords at once!”

“No wonder he opened up a shop! How many flying swords does he actually have?”

The two of them each sucked in a breath, but didn’t hesitate. Using the full speed of their Wind Walking technique, they raced in pursuit again, unwilling to let Meng Hao intimidate them. According to their estimations, Meng Hao could not have that many flying swords left. Even if he had opened a shop in the Low Level Public Zone, he couldn’t possibly have so many magical items.

“This time, you will die for sure!” The two pursuers increased their speed, entering the wild mountains. At this point, the pursuing fourth-level disciples caught up. One of them was Wang Tengfei’s friend Shangguan Song. His cultivation foundation was at the peak of the fourth level of Qi condensation. His face was grim. He secretly feared Meng Hao’s speed. And yet, he continued to pursue.

Time gradually passed by, and soon an hour had passed. Meng Hao continued forward, maintaining the distance from his pursuers. A few times he came into danger, but each time he produced a flying sword, detonated it, and escaped.

This left the pursuing fifth-level Condensation monks dumbstruck. They moaned to themselves, never having imagined that Meng Hao would have so many flying swords. At this point, he had detonated nearly twelve of them.

Combined with his sword-riding technique, his speed of evasion was

quite high.

“Dammit! Even if he has more flying swords, I can’t believe that he’ll produce many more. In any case, at the speed he’s been maintaining, plus detonating all those flying sword, he has used a huge amount of spiritual energy!”

“Correct! His cultivation foundation is at the fourth level of Qi condensation, not nearly as deep as mine. Using spiritual energy to ride flying swords wastes so much, it can kill you!” The two pursuing fifth-level Condensation monks were now getting pumped up. And yet just as they finished talking, they caught sight of Meng Hao up ahead, and they saw something that left them feeling anything but reassured.

Even as he ran, Meng Hao pulled out a second bag of holding, from which he produced a handful of medicinal pills which he swallowed. This he did with casual ease, leaving the onlookers with the feeling that he had countless medicinal pills at his disposal.

Actually, that was true. In the following four hours, the two pursuers discovered that he had an enormous amount of flying swords and medicinal pills. They were already deeply shaken.

“Opening a store is this profitable?” they thought. They were Cultivation monks of the fifth level of Qi condensation, and could not possibly be without medicinal pills. Furthermore, after having spent so much effort in their pursuit, they couldn’t bear to give up. Reluctantly, they produced some pills and consumed them, then continued their pursuit, their hearts filled with the desire to slay Meng Hao.

By the time the sixth hour had arrived, the dark, black mountain had appeared in front of Meng Hao. Lying concealed among the other wild mountains, it gave off a ghastly, cold air. It seemed as if it were filled with sinister gloom.

When he caught sight of the mountain, his eyes gleamed. He had expended a lot of energy along the way, and felt a bit of painful regret. To him, every flying sword and every medicinal pill cost Spirit Stones. But he couldn’t worry too much about that right now. Without hesitation, he shot

into the black mountain.

The two pursuing Cultivation Monks followed him in.

Some more time passed and more pursuers appeared, one by one. Upon seeing the black mountain, they gaped in astonishment, then entered.

Chapter 21: Meng Hao, You're Shameless!

The black mountain was not bare, but rather covered with a lush forest of trees that stretched up toward the heavens. The reason this place was called a black mountain was because all the trees were completely black, and it seemed to be filled with swirling Demonic energy.

It was completely different from any of the other mountains as far as the eye could see.

Upon entering the mountain, Meng Hao heard a deep roar, and two Demonic beasts of the third level of Qi condensation charged toward him. They had the bodies of wolves with long snake-like tails and were covered with thin fur. They glared at him hatefully.

As soon as they approached, Meng Hao stopped, then lifted up the copper mirror and shined it upon them. Instantly, one of the Demonic beast's right eye shot out a geyser of blood. It let out a miserable shriek, frightening its companion. Meng Hao's eyes flashed. This time, the mirror had exploded the Demonic beast's eye, not its buttocks. A similar thing had occurred when he fought Zhao Wugang. He didn't have any more time to think about it. Even as they moved to evade him, he hurtled past them.

As for the two fifth-level Cultivation monks, they raced in pursuit, infuriated. Their flying swords shot out, instantly slaying the two Demonic beasts. They didn't even stop to collect the Demonic Cores. Their bodies seemed to become rainbows as they raced in pursuit of Meng Hao.

"This is a Demonic mountain. I've heard that a Demon King lives on the peak. Meng Hao, fleeing to this place is just a way of seeking your own death."

"There's no need to flee. Come back and we can discuss things, maybe make a trade." The two Cultivation monks called after him as they pursued, their voices seemingly sincere, but their hearts filled with murderous intentions.

Meng Hao neither looked back nor responded to their calls, instead

speeding along in the direction of the peak of the mountain. Before long, he ran into a group of seven or eight Demonic beasts. Most of them seemed to be at the third level of Qi condensation. After cowing them with the copper mirror, he made his escape. Of course, the two fifth-level Cultivation Monks had no such ability, so they had to massacre their way through. Then, covered with blood—demonic blood, of course, not their own—they continued in pursuit. They were starting to grow exhausted. During the battle, they had used up even more medicinal pills. But as the saying goes, if you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off. Gritting their teeth, they continued their pursuit.

“They’re still after me...” Meng Hao, his face grim, had already reached the farthest point he had ever travelled on the black mountain. If he went any further, it would be difficult to avoid Demonic beasts of the fifth level of Qi condensation. A hard look appeared on his face, and with clenched jaw, he proceeded onward toward the mountaintop.

After time passed enough for half an incense stick to burn, a low roar suddenly sounded out, seeming to cover half of the mountain. Like a dark wind, a multi-colored giant wolf came toward him, howling. The wolf had legs two meters long, and bright red eyes which shone with killing intent. Suppressive fifth-level Qi Condensation spirit roiled away from it.

If it had been alone, it would not have counted for much. But behind it followed a group of five smaller multi-colored wolves with cultivation foundations at the peak of the fourth level, as well as another fifth level wolf. Their fierce howling filled the air.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, and without hesitation, he lifted the copper mirror and shone it toward the wolves. A miserable shriek poured out from the mouth of one of the wolves and blood poured out from its chest as if it had been stabbed. The other wolves looked on in shock, retreating unconsciously.

Moments later, unsure of what exactly was happening, and full of guesses, he gritted his teeth and proceeded forward. Two flying swords appeared beneath his feet, carrying him forward over ten meters in an instant. Further behind appeared the two fifth-level Condensation monks.

When they saw the pack of Demonic wolves, their expressions dropped. Even though they pursued Meng Hao together, they still had to guard against each other. This area was still in the jurisdiction of the Reliance Sect, but once outside the gates of the sect, it would not be a rules violation for one of them to kill the other.

Amidst pursuit, it would have been no big deal, but now they were facing a crisis. The two fifth-level Demonic wolves looked at them threateningly. That, not to mention the rest of the smaller Demonic wolves, caused the two to quickly come up with a plan. Immediately, they split, one running off to the left and the other to the right.

They moved quickly, but the Demonic wolves moved even faster. They were sentient Demonic beasts, and already felt an astonishing fear of the copper mirror, as well as, Meng Hao. Amidst their furious roars, however, he had made his escape, whereupon two Qi condensation fifth-level Cultivation monks invaded their territory.

The Cultivation monks had no time to consider their fury. They ran, pursued by the howling Demonic wolves. In moments they had fled far away.

Meng Hao let out a sigh. Look up toward the mountaintop, and then back toward the fleeing Cultivation monks, his eyes flashed.

“Those Demonic beasts will cause them a bit of trouble, and will keep them off my tail for a while. But the fourth two-hour period is almost here. The pill beacon will shine again, and then they’ll be able to find me.” Meng Hao looked again toward the mountain top. He clenched his jaw and ran forward.

Shortly after that, a beacon of light burst out of his bag of holding, shooting up into the sky. Even someone a great distance away would be able to see it clearly.

Every two hours, the beacon would appear, as it had already a few times today. This was the fourth time.

Meng Hao proceeded carefully, trying to avoid as many Demonic beasts as possible. Most of the ones he saw were of the fifth level of Qi

cultivation, so of course he feared them. It seemed they preferred to move about in groups, not alone, so even though the copper mirror provided some protection, he did his best to move around them. As such, his speed was reduced, and he could not run.

Time slowly passed, nearly an hour. Suddenly, a massive, furious roar sounded out throughout the whole mountain. At the same time, Meng Hao burst out from the thick forest, a worried expression on his face. Chasing him were seven or eight psychic Demonic apes. They were furious, and extremely fast, pursuing Meng Hao with unbridled fury.

Three of them were of the fifth level of Qi condensation, and this made Meng Hao groan inwardly. He had been very careful so far, and hadn't imagined that even as he carefully made his way around the troupe of Demonic apes, the mirror would of its own volition suddenly attack them, exploding one of the apes whose fur was so long it dragged on the ground. This of course raised the fury of the rest of the Demonic apes.

"Even if it is a Demonic ape with super long fur, it doesn't mean you have to act like this," said Meng Hao bitterly, looking at the copper mirror in his hands. He realized that he still didn't fully understand all the mysteries of the mirror. Now, though, he didn't have time to think about it. He ran down the mountain away from the Demonic apes. Looking back, he saw that the apes were closing in on him, so he waved the copper mirror, and another miserable shriek rang out. At that exact moment, Meng Hao saw that ahead of him, which was about the half-way point down or up the mountain, glittered the aura of flying swords.

His eyes shone and he raced forward. In an instant he was almost upon a group of four Cultivation monks of the fourth level of Qi condensation. One of them was Shangguan Song. They were in close combat with several Demonic bears. Blood filled the air, and it appeared that they had the upper hand, as the corpses of two Demonic bears lay at their feet.

"Meng Hao!" They caught sight of him almost as soon as he caught sight of them, and their eyes filled with murderous intent, especially Shangguan Song's.

They appeared to be exhausted. Their journey in the black mountain had been wrought with battle. Originally, they had been ten strong, but most of them had already given up. The four remaining had exercised control over their cultivation foundation with gritted teeth and followed after the pill beacon until they found themselves in this brave fight against the Demonic bears.

When they caught sight of Meng Hao, their eyes grew red, and they subconsciously wanted to switch the target of their flying swords' attacks.

"Dear Brothers, I received your orders to attract the attention of this troupe of Demonic apes. Quick, make your move!" As Meng Hao approached, he ignored the flying swords and shouted his words loudly so that the pursuing psychic apes would be sure to hear.

Even as the words were out of his mouth, shockingly furious roars reverberated from behind him as the seven or eight psychic apes burst out from the trees, their red eyes glowing.

"Meng Hao, you're shameless!!!"

"Dammit, you're too despicable!"

The four men's faces fell, and they tried to fall back, cursing Meng Hao. But the fight with the Demonic bears wouldn't permit it. Meng Hao, who was still worried about the whole situation, had already passed them, and the red-eyed Demonic apes charged forward furiously.

Meng Hao looked back at the four of them, killing intent appearing in his eyes. He slapped his bag of holding, and some flying swords shot out with a low hum.

"BOOM!"

The explosion thundered out, as the flying swords exploded. Meng Hao instantly sent two Flame Serpents to follow them, and several nearby trees exploded into bits. Borrowing some of the momentum from the explosion, Meng Hao swallowed a mouthful of blood and shot away. Behind him, the four Cultivation monks were impeded by the explosions. As for the Demonic apes, they had lost sight of Meng Hao. But the Cultivation

monks were right there in front of them, so they attacked instantly.

Miserable screams rang out, and Meng Hao continued onward without a backward glance.

"This place isn't too bad... it's just a bit dangerous." Meng Hao ran along, until he was sure the Demonic apes weren't following him, then stopped, panting. He looked around.

"It's not easy to keep hold of a Dry Spirit Pill," he murmured. He looked down at his bag of holding and let out a sigh, feeling somewhat distressed.

"I've already wasted thirty-one flying swords, and each one of those is basically a Spirit Stone. I've also consumed several medicinal pills, each of which is also equivalent to a Spirit Stone. And it isn't even the fifth two-hour period yet..." Meng Hao laughed bitterly, feeling twisted at heart.

"In the end, if I can consume the Dry Spirit Pill and make a breakthrough in my cultivation foundation, then it will all be worth it!" Veins of blood had appeared in his eyes. He was like a gambler who intended to win at any cost, and had gone all in.

"If those four fourth-level disciples don't get killed, they'll definitely be exhausted, and I doubt they'll be willing to continue their pursuit. Now, all I have left to worry about are the two fifth-level Condensation monks." His expression grew somber. His opponents had higher cultivation foundations than him, and there were two of them. It would be difficult to stand up to them, and as far as he was concerned, it wasn't worth it to kill them. The cost in Spirit Stones would be too great.

He rested for a bit, looking up at the mountaintop. Then he gritted his teeth and began to run. The fifth two-hour period arrived quickly, and almost as soon as the pill beacon shot up into the sky from his bag of holding, he heard the sinister voices of his two opponents coming from either side of him.

"Meng Hao, you can't escape!"

"Hand over the Dry Spirit Pill to me. I can let you die with your corpse intact. Otherwise I'll leave you here for the beasts, and nothing will

remain of you.”

Even as their voices echoed off into the distance, the two Cultivation monks’ bodies flashed like rainbows as they charged towards Meng Hao. Determination filled Meng Hao’s eyes and he fled onward. It appeared that up ahead was the resting place of some Demonic beasts.

Chapter 22: A Sword Resting in Demonic Python Skin

Not much time had passed. It seemed as if the entire black mountain were seething. The roars of Demonic beasts shook the air, rising and falling one after another. Even more frequent were the miserable shrieks which sounded out. The ten or more Cultivation monks who had dared not further their pursuit into the mountain looked pale. Fear filled their hearts, and now they were even less willing to enter the mountain than before.

“What happened? How come it seems like all the demonic beasts in the whole mountain are in a rage?”

“What’s going on? Brother Yin Tianlong and Brother Zhou Kai are both of the fifth level of Qi condensation, but even they would have a hard time raising the wrath of the entire mountain. Could they have done something unique and special?”

The small crowd at the foot of the mountain made their guesses, listening to the deafening roars.

As far as Yin Tianlong and Zhou Kai, they had already been tormented to near madness by Meng Hao’s tricks. They watched helplessly as Meng Hao moved about up ahead in the distance, along with vast amounts of demonic beasts. Based on the hatred in their eyes, if looks could kill, Meng Hao would have been dead several times over.

Yet, within the hatred was helpless exhaustion that only Yin and Zhou could truly understand. Every time they had begun to chase Meng Hao again, he had constantly used some sort of Demonic magic to provoke all types of Demonic beasts. With the mere flick of a sleeve, he would cause some part of a Demonic creature’s body to explode. The stench of blood filled the air, slowly driving the creatures crazy.

Seeing so many Demonic creatures made their scalps go numb, as the creatures didn’t just pursue Meng Hao. Once the creatures caught sight of

the two of them, they would begin chasing after them. Then, some distance away, Meng Hao would slip away like a loach.

“Dammit! I curse you to die in the belly of the beasts!!!” roared Zhou Kai. Next to him, Yin Tianlong sighed, looking even more exhausted.

Time slowly passed, and the beginning of another of the two-hour periods approached. In the darkness of night, the pill beacon was dazzling. As it revealed Meng Hao’s position, Zhou and Yin gnashed their teeth and pursued. As usual, Meng Hao used his Demonic magic to provoke more Demonic beasts, then led them to Zhou and Yin, whereupon he would watch them disappear amidst the pack of furious creatures.

“How can he have not been devoured by a Demonic creature already!?” Zhou and Yin were exhausted to the bones, whereas Meng Hao skipped and jumped about, filled with energy. Seeing this, hatred filled them to the marrow, and their gums itched with hatred. But there was nothing they could do.

In truth, Meng Hao was also exhausted. Every time the pill shone, he was forced to immediately arouse the attention of some demonic beasts. Of course, the copper mirror allowed him to stop the fastest creatures screaming in their tracks, thus giving him time to escape. Were it not for that, he would have long since dropped to the ground in fatigue.

Suddenly, he realized that he had reached the top of the mountain. The ground was covered with fissures and crevices, some of them so large that a person could easily fit inside. Panting, Meng Hao sat down behind a boulder to rest, looking down at the copper mirror in his hands. It was burning hot, as if everything that had happened today had made it incredibly excited. With a bitter smile, Meng Hao looked around and noticed a massive fissure up ahead, out of which seeped a thick black mist.

Just then, a roar suddenly erupted from the giant fissure, the same roar that earlier had quelled all the fierce beasts on the mountain. The roar seemed capable of shaking the whole world. It resounded like a thunderclap. In an instant, the entire area was clear of all demonic beasts,

as if the entire mountain now contained only this roar.

The roar seemed to vibrate even Meng Hao's mind, dispersing all the spiritual energy within his body. His facial expression changed. This roar was familiar. In his previous visits to the regions near the black mountain, he had heard it. It was a sound which curdled both blood and Qi, leaving one's mind filled with unease.

As the roar sounded out, Meng Hao forced his eyes to remain open and watch as the black mist poured out of the fissure. As the mist dispersed, Meng Hao was able to see a huge black python, over two meters thick, with a heinous and fierce countenance. About half its length had suddenly moved out of the fissure.

It looked to be in pain, and its fierce roar shook heaven and earth. Meng Hao spat out a mouthful of blood. He leaped out from behind the boulder and flew down the mountain, not daring to remain behind. But then he stopped, his curiosity having gotten the better of him. When he went back to take a second look, he noticed something interesting.

The python's body, half of which was visible sticking out of the fissure, seemed to be peeling. It looked as if it had two sets of skin. It coiled up on itself, rubbing the outer skin to shed it away.

"It's shedding?" Upon recognizing what was happening, Meng Hao sucked in a breath. He knew that pythons were weakest during the time in which they shed their skin. It took a while for it to happen, especially if the python were demonic in nature. With a body as large as this one, it would probably take even longer, perhaps several years.

"No wonder you can hear it roaring all the time. It must have been in the process of shedding for years." His gaze shifted, and he noticed something else in addition to the python.

Upon closer inspection, he gaped in amazement. It was a flying sword. It appeared to be exceedingly primitive, with no special characteristics at all. But, it had been stabbed deeply into the python's body. It appeared to have been there for quite a long time, many years perhaps.

The area around where the sword had stabbed into the body was dry and

withered, which attested to the power of the sword.

“This demonic python has a cultivation foundation of at least the seventh level of Qi condensation, perhaps the eighth. Maybe even the ninth...” His mouth grew dry. He could only imagine how tough the python’s skin was, which only further attested to how amazing the primitive-looking flying sword was.

“A flying sword which can stab a demonic creature like this must be a true treasure.” Meng Hao palpitated with eagerness, then let out a dejected sigh. With a cultivation foundation at the fourth level of Qi condensation, acquiring the sword was little more than a dream for him. Even if he were at the fifth level, it would be equally impossible.

Shaking his head, he headed down the mountain, eyes glittering. There was still something important to accomplish. The copper mirror in his sleeve continued to boil, and soon, he had a handful of demonic beasts following him, howling.

A few hours passed and dawn broke. The last of the twelve two-hour periods would soon end. Zhou and Yin had already given up all hope. They stared up at Meng Hao, who sat cross-legged further up the mountain.

If the two of them made the slightest move, he would rile up a group of beasts, and not only would they not succeed in their goal, they would most likely be injured. Couple that with their exhaustion, and the only thing they could do was gasp for breath and stare venomously at Meng Hao.

“Dammit. Meng Hao, how could you escape me!?” Zhou Kai panted for breath then let out a helpless howl. Meng Hao really was a loach that could come and go like a shadow within the jungle.

“Don’t you have your own skills?” said Yin Tianlong, who wasn’t very far away. Able to neither kill nor pursue, he was half mad, and his words seemed to contain no logic. “Can you just, not flee? There’s no need to use such wicked demonic magic to send beasts after us. Why don’t we have a fair fight?”

“My cultivation foundation isn’t as high as yours, how could I fight you?” said Meng Hao, also panting. “If you want to keep chasing me, I don’t

really have any other choice.” He swallowed another medicinal pill.

Never before in their lives had Zhou and Yin ever met anyone as seemingly unreasonable as Meng Hao. They both felt regret at heart. If they had known it would turn out like this, they would never have chased after him to steal the pill.

Time slipped by, and the hour approached for the sealing spell on the pill to dissipate. Yin Tianlong let out a long sigh. With a bitter laugh, he shook his head. There was nothing left he could do. He couldn't pursue or attack, lest he be forced to face Demonic beasts. His medicinal pills were exhausted, and he had lost two flying swords. How could he even attempt to steal the pill...? Of course, that was not to mention his opponent's tactics. His dazzling, wicked ideas seemed to have no end. Even the slightest bit of inattentiveness would lead to injury.

With a humiliated sigh, he gave one last look at Meng Hao, then turned and headed down the mountain, finally tormented into surrender.

As he left, Zhou Kai felt wracked with indecision. Dawn approached, as did the ending of the twelfth two-hour period, and with it, the unsealing of the medicinal pill in Meng Hao's bag of holding. Zhou Kai stamped his foot hatefully, then, without a word, turned and left. He was convinced that Meng Hao was just too hard to deal with. In fact, there was fear in his heart; if he didn't leave this place now, perhaps he never would.

Meng Hao watched the two of them leave and head down the mountain. He let out a very long sigh, and felt exhaustion fill his body like floodwaters. He bit his tongue and woke up a bit, then hurried off into the distance. He didn't leave the black mountain, but rather made his way to the mountaintop. There was the Demonic python there, but generally speaking it was relatively safe. After all, the python needed time to complete its transformation, and its roars kept away other Demonic beasts.

Meng Hao found a fissure in the rocks and sat down cross-legged. He glanced down at his bag of holding, suddenly feeling apprehensive.

“I wasted so many medicinal pills, each one worth Spirit Stones. Let me

calculate... including thirty-seven flying swords and more than forty Demonic Cores, that comes to... one hundred ninety-eight chunks of Spirit Stones. One hundred ninety-eight.” His body trembled, and he felt quite upset.

“Thankfully, the twenty-four hours is now up,” he said, trying to comfort himself, “and the Dry Spirit Pill is mine.” Pushing aside his disappointment, he forced his mind to be clear, then, looking around to make sure it was safe, he pulled out the copper mirror and began to make copies of the Dry Spirit Pill.

Mid-day arrived, and Meng Hao looked down at the pills in his hands. Ten Dry Spirit Pills. He forced out a smile, but disappointment was still visible in his face. It took a lot of Spirit Stones to copy a Dry Spirit Pill, many more than were required for a Demonic Core. Now he understood the exchange rates required by the copper mirror.

He clenched his jaw, then popped one of the pills into his mouth.

“Fifth level of Qi condensation! I have to reach the fifth level!” His eyes grew bloodshot, filled with resilient determination. He sat in meditation and began to circulate his cultivation foundation. Booming sounds resounded through his body as boundless spiritual energy erupted out of the Dry Spirit Pill, causing the spiritual forces in Meng Hao’s body to turn into a spinning vortex which suddenly spread outward in all directions.

Time went by slowly, and days passed. When Meng Hao, his eyes closed, broke through the fifth level of Qi condensation, the black mountain was filled with the roars of the python. Its transformation, like Meng Hao’s, seemed also to have reached a critical juncture.

Chapter 23: An Ancient Beast!

As Meng Hao sat in secluded meditation in the small mountain fissure, rumors about what had happened regarding the Dry Spirit Pill began to ripple out. This was especially true when Zhou and Yin returned. Many people saw them, but of course none dared to ask about who had ended up with the Dry Spirit Pill.

Because Meng Hao didn't appear, rumors began to spread that he had died.

At that exact same moment, Wang Tengfei stood with hands clasped in his Immortal's Cave on the East Mountain. The mountain breeze caused his hair to waft about and his long robe to rustle. He seemed exceedingly perfect in every way, especially his face, which was so beautiful and flawless that it could send women mad.

As a matter of fact, a mere nod of his head could drive crazy not just the young female Cultivators of the Reliance Sect, but of the Cultivation World of the entire State of Zhao.

His gentle eyes, amiable disposition, beautiful features, haughty latent talent, refined cultivation foundation, astonishing family background... all of it seemed to prove that Wang Tengfei was a darling of heaven, which in turn caused people to respect him even more. He was blessed by heaven.

He stood there, an enchanting smile on his face, his eyes seemingly filled with stars as he stared off into the distance. His gaze seemed to almost bore directly through the mountain ranges to fall directly onto the black mountain filled with Demonic beasts.

He stared for a long time, his eyes flickering with an indiscernible excitement.

"The time has come," he said, his smile light but his heart afire. "I spent three years digging through the ancient records, then another year searching high and low throughout the State of Zhao. After that, I waited for two more years here in the Reliance Sect. Finally, today has arrived. Before the Winged Rain-Dragon died, it flew to this place.

“I never imagined that the two most important things to me would relate to the Reliance Sect. Is my destiny really to be realized here? After the current matter is ended, I will enter the Inner Sect and prepare to perfect my foundation.” His smile grew even more enchanting.

“Brother Wang, we are prepared,” said a man who stood behind Wang Tengfei. His cultivation foundation was at the fifth level of Qi condensation. He spoke with utmost respect. “Even the members of the other Sects are assembled according to your requirements. We shall certainly succeed. Unfortunately, Shangguan Song hasn’t returned, and we don’t know where he is. It’s not certain whether or not he was able to invite Master Uncle Shangguan.”

“Very well,” said Wang Tengfei with a smile. “We’ve been preparing for this matter for a long time. According to my deductions, the Demonic python is almost at the end of its two-year shedding period. The moment it completes the process, it is at its weakest.” His eyes grew brighter. Not only had he spent years in preparation, he had been required to pay the price of four valuable treasures, as well as tens of thousands of Spirit Stones, to prepare the spell. Even for him, it was a price which could only be paid once. As of now, he had nothing left.

“Don’t worry, Brother Wang. We will definitely succeed. Allow Junior Brother to congratulate you in advance on acquiring the Core.”

“Of course we will succeed. I, Wang Tengfei, have never failed.” He laughed, and his expression grew even more resplendent. If the ancient records were correct, he would return with a valuable treasure that would accompany him for the rest of his life, and also an ancient Legacy which would allow him to control heaven and earth. As for the Demonic Core, it could have been considered a treasure when it was in its prime. But after all these years, it would have faded, and would not be as effective. However, it could still help him break through from the sixth level of Qi condensation to the seventh.

“Tomorrow at dawn, we shall go to the black mountain,” said Wang Tengfei mildly. With a smile, he rubbed his right arm. Hidden underneath the sleeve was a red mark. He rubbed it, and his eyes once again flashed

with excitement.

It was a mark left by a Blood Drop which had fallen onto him from the Heavens when he was six years old. After that day, he was surrounded by a dream in which he flew through the sky and became the sovereign of the heavens.

With the Blood Drop had come knowledge of a Legacy, as well as a special sense, which, when coupled with the information from the records of two-hundred years ago, had enabled him to find a thread of a clue which had led him here.

“No one in the entire world except for me could do this. And that is because I have the Legacy and the Blood Drop, which is unique in the world.” He gazed off toward the black mountain, his smile even more entrancing, filled with anticipation.

“If this was still the era of Founder Reliance, then he would definitely take control of the dragon. But he’s been missing for four hundred years. That is good fortune for me. According to the ancient records, as well as my own investigations, I know that when the dragon came here two hundred years ago, its Qi had been suppressed by the treasure. Few people realized that. Even though this is Reliance Sect territory, the area has powerful restrictive spells. Not only was there no Qi emanating out, even if there were, no one would have been able to sense it. And even if someone entered the area, their vision would have been blocked by the magic, and they would have been unable to see it.

“As for the Demonic python, it spent most of its time in slumber. It was only because of the shedding process that it began to roar and howl. Only when the Demonic python shed its skin would the restrictions dissipate, and it would be safe to enter. Thanks to my Blood Drop Legacy, I was able to deduce these matters. No one else understands even the half of it.

“A valuable treasure, a complete Legacy, all there, waiting for Wang Tengfei!” His smile growing wider, he flicked his sleeve and walked back into the Immortal’s Cave. Moonlight circled around him, unwilling to part from him. The mystical scene caused the other Cultivation Monk’s

expression to be filled with even more veneration.

The next day at dawn, atop the black mountain, in that virtually invisible fissure, Meng Hao's entire body had grown crimson red. Sweat poured off him, and massive amounts of black filth oozed continuously out of his pores.

He had been in mediation for several days, but now his eyes opened. Outside, the roars of the Demonic python grew more intense. It seemed it had reached a critical juncture of its own.

Meng Hao was not distracted, though. He focused and circulated his cultivation foundation. He pushed over and over again, but the fourth-level bottle neck was still there. His eyes red, he swallowed ten Dry Spirit Pills, whereupon his head began to buzz, and his body trembled violently. A loud ripping sound could be heard, and it seemed as if his body were floating like a piece of paper in the wind.

Inside his body, his Qi and blood vessels sparkled like crystal, nearly transparent, like an otherworldly omen. The spiritual energy in his body whirled, forming a magnificent lake. It wasn't a big lake, but it was a lake nonetheless.

The lake, the Core lake, existed in Meng Hao's dantian region, quite heavy.

Meng Hao knew that he could control the power and enable it to erupt with the power of the fifth level of Qi condensation. To a Cultivation monk who had perfected their foundation, it was weak and insubstantial, but as far as Qi condensation went, the fifth level was watershed, the second water shed being the seventh level, followed by the ninth.

His head buzzed for quite some time. Eventually, Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes, and they glittered like they had before. A burst of popping sounds rang out. He seemed to have grown a bit taller, and though his skin was still dark, a new air emanated from him.

"The fifth level of Qi condensation." Meng Hao took a deep breath, then smiled. He had reached the fifth level of Qi condensation. Now he could practice the Wind Walking technique. That, combined with flying swords,

would give him much greater speed both in movement and attack. It was completely beyond the fourth level.

“Dry Spirit Pills really are beyond ordinary,” said Meng Hao, looking down at the two Dry Spirit Pills in front of him. “But, it still has its limitations. Perhaps after consuming a lot of them, they will become less effective, just like the pills in the past. I wonder if I will be able to use them to get to the sixth level of Qi condensation.” As he contemplated this, his expression suddenly changed. The roars of the Demonic python now carried a tone of misery. Booming sounds rang out. Meng Hao leaned forward, and he looked outside of the fissure.

As he looked, his pupils constricted and his hands clenched into fists.

Not far away on the mountaintop, was a white-robed youth, extraordinarily beautiful, as if his perfect body was a blessing from heaven. A golden flying sword rotated around him, and the wind blew furiously around as he battled with the Demonic python.

It was none other than... Wang Tengfei.

He smiled calmly, and his kind, amiable eyes made him seem like the sun. He seemed to glow, as if he could eliminate all the shadows around him.

When he attacked, he seemed perfect, as if heaven approved his each and every movement.

Around him were at least nine others, one of whom was Shangguan Xiu. He flicked his sleeves as he took the lead in battling the Demonic python. As for the others, all of them had Qi condensation levels of the seventh level or higher. All were strangers whom Meng Hao had never seen before. They surrounded the Demonic python, preparing to kill it. Booming sounds rang out, and the python let out astonishing roars.

Meng Hao stared at Wang Tengfei, not moving a muscle. But deep in his eyes was a dark look that slowly grew, replacing any mildness until it filled his eyes.

After a short bit of time, the Demonic python's roars grew more and

more miserable, and wounds covered its body. Blood splattered everywhere. This truly was its weakest state. The surrounding Cultivation monks attacked even more fiercely. Wang Tengfei smiled, as perfect as ever, his eyes filled with an indiscernible excitement.

He had waited for this day for a long time.

Suddenly, from the peaks of nine surrounding mountains, shining silvery light coiled up and linked together to form a tactical spell. The spell ever so slowly filled the air, then broke into countless silver threads which then turned into a silver fog which shot down toward the ground. It seemed that they were preparing to seal the Demonic python.

But, just then, the python looked up toward the heavens and let out a roar which resounded out over the black mountain, shaking everything. Suddenly, on top of the python's head appeared the ghostly image of a beast.

The creature was bright red, with enormous wings and a hideous-looking head. Its sharp claws glittered, and it had a long tail. The instant the ghost appeared, the swirling winds in the sky seemed to change colors, and astonished expressions appeared on the faces of everyone present. Only Wang Tengfei's eyes appeared more excited. Fortunately, the ghostly image appeared for only a moment, then disappeared.

When the ghostly image disappeared, the Demonic python shot out of the deep fissure, its body sleek and smooth. It let out a frightening roar and spit reddish mist out of its mouth, an attack which then shot out in all directions. The Cultivation monks couldn't avoid it, not even Wang Tengfei, and they could only watch helplessly as it enveloped them, then shot out into the distance. Because of the attack, when the silver fog fell from the sky, it didn't just fall down upon the Demonic python, but Wang Tengfei and the others as well.

As the silver fog descended upon them, Meng Hao's heart began to thump wildly. Before, he had seen a sword sticking out from the Demonic python's body. But as of now, the sword was nowhere to be seen. Without the slightest hesitation, he leaped up and, moving faster than he ever had

in his life, jumped onto a flying sword and shot toward the top of the mountain and the large fissure.

“Go! Go! Go!” Meng Hao said under his breath. Without any regard for safety, he charged into the fissure-like cave, ignoring the strange odor which filled the air. As he moved deeper into the cave, he saw a massive snakeskin, stuck into which was the small, primitive-looking sword.

Without even a pause, he grabbed the sword, his heart thumping, face flushed with excitement. Just as he was about to leave, his eyes widened. Despite his extreme level of excitement, he was still able to gasp in shock. The thing really was a python skin, but it was also something else, something shockingly frightening that Meng Hao had never before seen in his life.

It was ... the corpse of a creature. A massive, shriveled corpse, hundreds of meters long. The black mountain seemed to be hollow inside, and the creature's corpse filled more than half of it.

Also visible were two gigantic, mostly disintegrated wings. Despite being dead, the creature's massive, hideous head was incredibly frightening. This creature was the same as the ghostly image which had just appeared, and now it was clear that the so-called Demonic python was actually the creature's tail.

“A tail that becomes a demon!” said Meng Hao, stupefied. “What Demonic beast is this?! If it's a Demonic beast... it must have a Demonic Core!” He clenched his jaw. Based on his experience collecting Demonic Cores, it wouldn't be located in the creature's belly. Most Demonic Cores were located in the head. He dashed toward the horrific-looking head, and with a swipe of the primitive-looking sword, split it open. Sure enough, inside was a shriveled Demonic Core. He grabbed it, and was about to leave, when suddenly his heart began thumping even harder. From his current position, he could see that beneath the head of the creature's corpse was a skeleton.

Who knew how many years the skeleton had lay crushed under the head. Next to the skeleton was a golden-colored bag of holding.

Blood boiling, Meng Hao suddenly had the feeling that his destiny was thick in this place. He had acquired the sword, the Demonic Core and now a golden bag of holding. He snatched it up, then shot out of the cave like the wind, and then down the mountain, filled with incredible excitement.

“I’ve struck it rich! This time, I’ve really freaking struck it rich!”

Meng Hao had only been inside the cave for the space of about ten breaths, and in ten more, he was gone from the mountain. The moment his shadow disappeared, a shape began to descend from the silver fog that hung in the sky. It was a person wearing a white robe; Wang Tengfei. With a flick of his sleeve, he floated down slowly. He looked around for a moment, then sped toward the cave.

Chapter 24: Who was it?!

Wang Tengfei looked so excited that if anyone could have seen him, they would have been shocked. No one had ever seen such an expression appear on his face.

To other people, Wang Tengfei was the darling of heaven, with a mild expression, amiable smile, and beautiful appearance, perfect in every way.

But at the moment, he could not help but show his excitement. He had prepared for this moment for years, had spent so many resources, all to get to this point, a point he had looked forward to for years. He would finally have a treasure he could carry with him for his entire life. His heart nearly burst with frenzied excitement.

One of the main reasons he had joined the Reliance Sect to begin with was to acquire this treasure.

Moving as fast as he could, he entered the cave. When he caught sight of the massive, frightening corpse, he let out a loud laugh and his eyes glowed. He dashed toward the creature's tail, the part that had turned into the demonic python. He searched about for a while, where upon a look of confusion appeared on his face. His eyes widened. After looking across the entire corpse, he stood there looking dumbstruck.

"What's going on... It can't be. The treasure can only be acquired after the python sheds its skin. The only safe time to enter is right now. How could it not be here? It's impossible!" A heinous look filled his eyes, and his head spun. He searched the corpse again, seeking out the place where he remembered the sword should have been sticking out. When he found it, it was clear that the sword had already been taken. Wang Tengfei's body began to shake, and an unbelievable fury appeared in his eyes. He let out a howl that shook the entire black mountain.

That was when he noticed that the corpse's head had been split open and the Demonic Core removed. When he saw the skeleton, his mood sank even deeper, and he barely even looked at it.

His whole person appeared savage with fury. He dashed outside and

pulled up his sleeve, hoping to get some reaction from the Blood Drop on his arm. But there was no reaction whatsoever. In fact, it was as if the Blood Drop had been wiped away!

He searched the black mountain high and low but found nothing.

In the end, he returned dumbly to the cave and looked at the creature's corpse. He let out another shrill shriek.

"I spent three years searching the ancient texts. Three years, with no time for cultivation! I spent hundreds of thousands of Spirit Stones before I found the clue from two hundred years ago that led me to the Flying Rain-Dragon!" His body trembled, and his face contorted. Any beauty at all in him was gone, replaced by madness.

"I spent a year searching throughout the State of Zhao, in the mountains and the wilds. I went everywhere, all the districts. The reactions of the Blood Drop finally led me here!" His eyes red, he clenched his fists angrily. Anyone who saw him like this would surely be shocked in the extreme.

"For the treasure, I deigned to begin my spiritual studies in this damned Reliance Sect. Dammit, Dammit! I've had to endure for nearly three years already!!!" His heart ached, as if it had been stabbed with an invisible sword that smashed his arrogance to pieces. Up until now, he really had never believed that he could possibly fail.

"To prepare the tactical spell to suppress the dragon, I spent all my remaining Spirit Stones!! I used some precious power of my clan to suppress information about the ancient Flying Rain-Dragon from getting out. I even refused the aid of my clan-members because I wanted the treasure and the legacy to be the true starting point of my training!

"Who was it? Who took my treasure!?" His body trembled violently, his head buzzed, and his blood roiled. He had spent so much, and someone else had benefited. He spit out a mouthful of blood onto his white robe, staining it red.

It was like a man in the mortal world who paid the bride-price, bought a luxuriously decorated mansion, found the most beautiful bride, then arranged an amazing wedding feast to which he invited countless friends

and family. Then, in front of everyone's eyes, filled with anticipation, he entered the nuptial chamber and saw his beautiful, blushing bride in her red wedding gauzes, then threw himself upon her...

Only to suddenly find he had become a different person. Everything that belonged to him was suddenly being enjoyed by some other bloke. Even his face had been taken away!

"Who took my ancient Cultivation sword!?" Wang Tengfei again shouted mournfully, then spit out another mouthful of blood. He staggered backward a few paces, his face pale, his eyes burning with madness. He couldn't accept it, not at all. Never before had he failed, ever. This, coupled with his arrogance, caused his heart to be filled with a powerful, humiliated fury.

"Who stole the treasure I planned to use to rebuke the Cultivation world!" As he thought about the price he had paid to reach this point, he coughed up another mouthful of blood. His robe was now almost completely red as he staggered backward.

"You didn't just take the treasure, you took the Demonic Core. Without that, I can't break through to the seventh level! Who are you?! Who are you who took away my fortune! That was my treasure, that was my Demonic Core!!" His face twisted with madness as he continued his search, but to no avail.

His miserable roars reached Meng Hao's ears as he fled for his life. His eyes glittered excitedly, and he ran even faster.

"I'm rich. Really, really rich." His heart raced and his mouth felt dry, and his speed increased until it far exceeded his previous speed limitation. Only a short time passed before he reached the Immortal's Cave on the South Mountain.

He had guessed that the treasures he'd taken were very important to Wang Tengfei. Since he had virtually stolen them, he could not very well announce their existence publicly. He wanted to hide himself away as well, but if he did so, it would only attract more attention to himself. Instead, he should place himself in the open and attach himself to a position of

reason, be bold and assured, with justice on his side.

He licked his lips, and his eyes fairly shone. Even though Fatty still had the jade slip that opened the Immortal's Cave, Meng Hao still had another jade slip given to him by Elder Sister Xu, which he knew could open the door. If there were only one key, how could she have opened the door when he sat counting his Spirit Stones that one time?

When he entered the Immortal's Cave, he didn't see Fatty. At first, he was worried. But then he realized that even though Fatty looked naive, he was actually quite clever, and wouldn't let himself be taken advantage of. Not thinking about it any further, he sat down cross-legged, took a deep breath and pulled out the golden bag of holding. He grew even happier at the sight of it, and when he opened it, he started to murmur softly to himself.

"It's so big. It seems it can hold... what?" Before he even finished his sentence, his body grew stiff, and he sucked in another breath. When he looked in the bag of holding, his mind went blank, then began to buzz.

"Holy crap! Holy crap! I really am rich!!" His hands trembled as they gripped the bag of holding. It took a few moments for him to get his thoughts in order again. He pulled out a Spirit Stone with a shaky hand.

The Spirit Stones in the bag were not quite the same as his other Spirit Stones. About as big as a finger, the Spiritual energy which swirled about in them was not dense, and they also contained a strange swirling mist inside. And the sheer amount... inside the bag of holding were over two thousand Spirit Stone chunks!

He had never seen such a vast amount of wealth in his entire life. He could not even breathe for a moment. His body trembled, and he stared blankly. Other than the Spirit Stones, the only things in the bag were some articles of clothing and a few other miscellaneous items.

Sweat began to drip down Meng Hao's forehead. It wasn't hot inside the Immortal's Cave, but his body felt as if it were burning. After a bit of time went by, he began to laugh, a hearty laughter filled with joy.

"These Spirit Stones are strange. They're big, but their spiritual energy is

just average. But the quantity, hahaha...” After some time passed, he got himself under control. Licking his lips, he pulled out another of the objects he had acquired, the withered Demonic Core. He looked at it, his eyes gleaming intensely. He took a deep breath.

“That gigantic Demonic beast must have been dead for many years. Eventually, its tail transformed into a Demonic python. It must have been incredibly powerful when it was alive. And its Demonic Core...” Meng Hao’s breathing grew ragged as he looked at the hard, dried out Core. He brought out the copper mirror, intending to make some duplicates.

Almost as soon as he pulled it out, and before he could even place the Demonic Core on its surface, the mirror suddenly began to burn so hotly that it almost injured Meng Hao’s hand. An invisible force burst out from the mirror, charging toward the Demonic Core.

A bang sounded out as the Core in Meng Hao’s hand was struck by the invisible attack. In an instant, another invisible force shot out from the copper mirror and struck out at the Demonic Core. It was as if the Demonic Core had suddenly turned into a long-furred demonic creature, and the copper mirror had gone mad with the desire to destroy it.

Meng Hao was dumbstruck. He instantly grabbed the mirror, and, enduring the pain, shoved it back into his bag of holding. The Demonic Core dropped to the ground with a thump, a multitude of small cracks now visible on its withered surface.

“Dammit. This is a Demonic Core, not a furred demonic beast.” Meng Hao painfully hurried to pick up the Core.

It was a good thing the withered Demonic Core had a tough outer crust. The copper mirror’s violent attack had damaged its surface, and now, a small gleaming pellet was visible, from which wafted the aroma of dense spiritual energy. It instantly filled the Immortal’s Cave and caused his eyes to glitter. Considering the violent reaction of the copper mirror, he didn’t dare to attempt to duplicate it. He hesitated for a moment, then stored it away.

After taking another deep breath, he pulled out the third of his

acquisitions, the small, primitive-looking sword. Holding in front of him, he smiled.

“This sword is incredibly sharp. It could stab into the demonic python, and was even able to split that giant demon’s head open. It’s definitely something special.” He looked at the small sword in his hand. It was made not of gold or iron, but wood. On its surface were some faint lines of gold that seemed to have some sort of magical properties. Even though it seemed primitive, even just thinking about the wooden flying sword and its incredible sharpness made Meng Hao incredibly excited.

Chapter 25: Sovereign of Heaven

“This treasure must have a special history.” Meng Hao swung the wooden sword, then stabbed it into the ground. It went in easily. Smiling, Meng Hao pulled it out, even happier than before.

Suddenly, he lifted his head, looking surprised. He sensed that the spiritual energy in the Immortal’s Cave was suddenly thinner than before. Actually, it seemed to have completely disappeared.

Even though there wasn’t originally a huge amount of spiritual energy, for all of it to disappear should not be possible. Spiritual energy was the Qi of heaven and earth, which pulsed through various mountains like great arteries. The Reliance Sect was just such a place. It should be impossible for the spiritual energy to suddenly dry up for no reason.

Curious, Meng Hao stabilized his Qi and concentrated, casting his senses about. Suddenly, he looked back at the wooden sword, disbelief covering his face. He had just discovered that all the spiritual energy in the room had been absorbed by the wooden sword.

“The sword... it can absorb spiritual energy?” Meng Hao was shocked. After a moment, he slapped his bag of holding and produced a Spirit Stone chunk. After placing it next to the sword, he watched as the Spirit Stone slowly grew dark over the space of about ten breaths .

He picked the Spirit Stone back up, feeling a bit sad at the loss of a Spirit Stone, but excited at the same time.

“This sword... it truly is a great treasure.” He gazed at the sword with a look of determination, then slowly drew it across one of his fingers. With ease, it sliced open a cut. Meng Hao focused on his cultivation foundation. Sure enough, he felt the spiritual energy in his body being sucked out continuously through the cut.

He covered his finger, excitement clear in his eyes. Within moments, the wound had healed, and Meng Hao gazed at the sword, laughing foolishly.

“If I used this sword when battling a magic-user, all I would need to do is

cut them, and their spiritual energy would be drained away and I could trample over them. Too bad I only have one. If I had two, or ten, or a hundred, then I could drain my opponent's spiritual energy even faster. How astonishing would that be...?" An image appeared in his mind of himself wielding a hundred wooden swords, all stabbing into Wang Tengfei's body.

His journey into the black mountain, and spending all those Spirit Stones, had definitely been worth it.

With that thought, he suddenly took a deep breath and pulled out the copper mirror.

"I wonder how many Spirit Stones..." He hesitated for a moment, but couldn't stop thinking about how amazing the sword was. He placed it down onto the mirror. As soon as it touched the surface, the mirror flashed, and the sword was sucked inside. Meng Hao had never seen this happen before, and it caused him quite a shock. He tried to grab the mirror to stop it, but was too slow. The wooden sword was gone.

"What's going on? Dammit, mirror, I went through a lot of painful hardships to get that sword, you, you, you... okay, calm down, calm down." Panting a bit, he forced himself to grow calm. After considering for some time, he took out a Spirit Stone chunk and placed it onto the mirror. It disappeared.

"Hmm. Has it already started the duplication process?" Meng Hao's heart thumped, and with an anxious expression, he put in another Spirit Stone. One chunk, two chunks, three chunks... A disheartened expression appeared on his face. The mirror was like a bottomless hole. Before much time had passed, Meng Hao had already put two hundred Spirit Stones into it.

"Dammit, dammit..." He wanted to stop, but refused to get to this point and have nothing to show for it. Also, he knew that if he gave up now, it would essentially mean giving up the mirror's duplication ability.

He could only endure his frustration and put more Spirit Stones in. Three hundred, four hundred, all the way to one thousand. His face grew

pale. His hand shook as he held out another Spirit Stone.

“When will this end, mirror? Are you stealing all the Spirit Stones I just got?” He gritted his teeth. He’d already dropped in one thousand Spirit Stones. He couldn’t give up now. With eyes as bloodshot as a gambling addict, he threw in more Spirit Stones. Finally, when he threw in the two thousandth stone, the mirror began to shine with bright, multicolored light, indicating that the duplication had begun. By this point, Meng Hao was a bit numb. He stared mutely at the multicolored light, which slowly dissipated over a few seconds.

When the light was gone, there were two identical wooden swords on the mirror.

When he saw them, some of the color returned to his face. He picked them up, feeling a mix of emotions from sadness to anger to pain. All he could do was comfort himself.

“It’s okay, no problem,” he muttered to himself through clenched teeth. “What are a couple thousand Spirit Stones worth anyway? Just a trifle. You can’t get something new without giving up something old. It’s worth it to have two of these wooden swords.” He spoke the word “trifle” with a bit of bitterness. He quickly put the copper mirror away and looked again at the two wooden swords. He sat there for a while thinking about their power. Slowly, he began to calm down.

Determination once again filled his eyes. After a while, he put the two treasured wooden swords away. As for the second sword, it was worth two thousand Spirit Stones as far as Meng Hao was concerned.

With a bitter laugh, he sat there cross-legged in meditation, waiting for the spiritual energy in the Immortal’s Cave to return. Suddenly, his eyes opened, and he retrieved the Demonic Core from his bag of holding.

“Even though I just broke through to the fifth level of Qi condensation, who knows how much progress my cultivation foundation will make if I take this pill...”

With a determined look, he swallowed the Demonic Core and closed his eyes. His body began to vibrate. The Demonic Core dissolved into an

incredibly dense flood of spiritual energy which instantly inundated Meng Hao.

The density of this spiritual energy was beyond any medicinal pill Meng Hao had ever consumed. In fact, there was no way to even compare it to anything. The Core exploded with a white brightness, sweeping over Meng Hao's body. Blood sprayed out of his mouth and his body shook. But he held on, and the Core lake grew larger and larger. Moments later, Meng Hao experienced a feeling of boundlessness.

With each pulsing expansion, he felt a severe pain and his body shook even harder. His face grew pale, and he gritted his teeth as hard as he could.

Then, the Core lake began to churn and roil, and an astonishing level of spiritual power began to form. Despite the pain, Meng Hao could sense his cultivation foundation expanding from the initial stage of the fifth level to the middle stage. Time passed, although he wasn't sure how much. Accompanied by the thundering of the Core lake, his cultivation foundation climbed even higher to the peak of the fifth level.

Then, his head buzzed, and his cultivation foundation suddenly broke through the fifth level and entered... the sixth level of Qi condensation!

And not just the initial stage of the sixth level, it continued to climb to the middle stage of the sixth level. Then it slowly began to stop. The clothes on Meng Hao's body had been reduced to ash. Only the bags of holding remained at his side. Black filth completely covered him, but if you looked closely, you would see that his skin sparkled translucently, as if rays of morning sun emanated from it.

His hair was longer, reaching down to his shoulders, and he was a bit taller. His body no longer seemed frail and weak, but rather tall and slender.

His features were still somewhat swarthy, but his countenance shone with a strength too difficult to describe. It was otherworldly.

His Core lake seethed and churned, filling his entire body. Deep in its recesses, the Demonic Core settled down. For some reason, it didn't

dissolve, but rather sat there, unmoving.

If it only just sat there, it would not be anything to think about. But when his cultivation foundation reached the sixth level, his head buzzed, and within the buzzing, he felt the indistinct pull of some sort of Legacy. It seemed to be emanating from the Demonic Core, settling onto his mind like a branding iron.

It must be some sort of Blood Legacy from the Flying Rain-Dragon, left for its weak, young offspring. As it had approached death, it fused the Legacy into its Demonic Core. The Demonic python must have intended to consume it after shedding its skin. And of course, Wang Tengfei, possessing a Blood connection to the Legacy, had lusted for the same thing. Sadly... Meng Hao got it first.

Meng Hao suddenly found himself dreaming. He was flying in the middle of the sky, rebuking the highest heavens, rocking the earth, surrounded by churning winds and clouds. He was the Lord of the heavens, and when the other flying beasts looked at him, they trembled as if they had lost the qualification to fly, and would let him slaughter them.

He was the Sovereign of Heaven, a darling, worshiped by all creatures. It seemed as if it were an ancient age, very long ago.

That feeling of flying in the heavens left Meng Hao feeling almost crazy, almost in love with the feeling. He flew for a long time, and the entire time, a multitude of fierce beasts retreated from him in fear, and countless people on the ground prostrated themselves in worship.

With the wind and earth beneath him, only the heavens could match up to him, but he was their equal.

Then, he reached a lake, and he lowered his head to look at himself. He was a dragon, tens of thousands of meters long, with two, massive wings, each one also tens of thousands of meters long. He possessed an indescribable power which could shape the world.

His head was fierce and savage, and he had an incredibly long tail. All of it merged together to form a boundless nobility which created an electric buzz in Meng Hao's mind. His mind seemed to rip open, and a voice rang

out.

“I am the Winged Rain-Dragon of ancient times!” It filled his mind, filled the world, and left everything trembling. All the living creatures roared. The ancient Winged Rain-Dragon’s Qi and blood vessels had long since vanished from the earth, but some of its descendants still existed. Although they might be weak, the Legacy still existed.

At that exact moment, on the East Mountain of the Reliance Sect, in his Immortal’s Cave, Wang Tengfei’s face grew dark. The fury in his heart nearly made him go mad. He had tasted failure, and was having a hard time accepting it. No matter how many times he tried to use the Blood Drop to sense the Legacy or his opponent, nothing happened. He didn’t know what was happening.

“Did you find it?” said Wang Tengfei, suppressing the fury in his heart as he lifted his head to look at the young man standing in front of him. It was the other young men who had accompanied him that day in addition to Shangguan Song.

Chapter 26: Bewilderment

“Brother Wang, I secretly checked around and asked quite a few disciples throughout the Sect. I don’t think I left anything out.” This young man was also famous in the Reliance Sect, but in front of Wang Tengfei, he was completely respectful. He had never seen Wang Tengfei like this, and was a bit hesitant. He had begun speaking with a respectful bow. “I even looked around in the Servants’ Quarters and followed up on Zhou Kai, Han Zong and some others. At that time, there were thirty-seven people who weren’t present in the Sect. Of those thirty-seven people, I eliminated twenty-nine as suspects. Among the rest, there are six of whom there is no evidence to suggest they were at the black mountain. Only two were definitely there. Meng Hao and Han Zong.”

Wang Tengfei looked more and more angry. He raises his hard eyes, which caused the young man’s heart to grow cold. He nervously lowered his head.

“Han Zong was also at the black mountain... Meng Hao?” Wang Tengfei frowned. Meng Hao’s name sounded familiar to him.

“Meng Hao is... the person who injured Brother Lu,” the young man said hastily.

Wang Tengfei’s face grew darker, and his heart burned. He had planned for so many years and expended so many resources. For so long, he had taken the whole matter to be concluded before it began. It was his great victory, something he could take back to his clan to refine them. But then, it was snatched away from him. When he thought of the sword, his face twisted in pain. That was his tool to rebuke heaven and earth. And when he thought of the Legacy of the Flying Rain-Dragon, his heart wept.

Before today, he had been fully self-confident, completely assured of his success. Everything belonged to him, that was just his good fortune. Only he was qualified to have such luck. Yet he then met an unexpected defeat, a blow he had never imagined he would receive. He found it extremely difficult to accept, as if the heart-rending turn of events had not actually

happened.

Breathing deeply, Wang Tengfei opened his mouth to speak, but then suddenly began to tremble as a burning pain arose on his right arm. He lifted up the sleeve and stared at his arm, watching as the Blood Drop slowly disappeared. There was nothing he could do but watch it go away, and after it had left, his beautiful features twisted with fury and defeat. The Legacy was gone. He coughed up some blood.

He knew that at this moment, the person who had snatched away his treasure was now fully connected to the Legacy. He would never again be able to use the Blood Drop to sense anything, because the Legacy had already chosen the other person.

When the young man in front of him saw this happen, he grew frightened. He was about to take a step forward when Wang Tengfei suddenly lifted his head up and shouted, "Beat it!"

His booming voice reverberated, and the young man's face went white. He had never seen such a succession of different expressions on Wang Tengfei's face. His body cold, he left.

Within the Immortal's Cave, Wang Tengfei's eyes grew red and his mind seethed as he thought of Han Zong and Meng Hao. He could not help but think about the day he had looked down on the Outer Sect ants in the square.

He frowned, his face growing more somber. He thought about how the Blood Drop wasn't able to sense the legacy, and how it had been wiped out by his opponent. Regardless of if it were Han Zong or Meng Hao, neither of them should have been able to do it.

"Just who are you?!" His eyes shot with blood, he slapped his bag of holding and a flash of silver light appeared and coalesced into a silver, octagonal tactical spell, which floated in front of him.

He stared at it for some time, then determination filled his eyes. This was one of the spells he had prepared for one of the mountains surrounding the black mountain. After being used, it needed to regenerate for several hours, whereupon it could be reused.

He had already decided that he would activate the spell, and even if it injured him, he would cast his senses inside to see who was present that day in the black mountain region.

Looking at the silver tactical spell in front of him, Wang Tengfei bit his tongue and spit out a bit of blood. As the blood splashed onto the spell, his fingers flickered in an incantation pattern, and suddenly his head hummed and his awareness flickered. Amidst the indistinct feeling, he was suddenly able to sense several Qi sources emanating out in waves.

“One, two... nine people that I invited to help me, this is their Qi...” Wang Tengfei’s face grew pale; the spell in front of him began to quiver, and cracks appeared on its surface. But he didn’t give up, and instead continued to cast his senses into it.

A vague outline began to appear in his mind, filled with several dots of light. Ten of the lights were familiar to him, and another one of them belonged to Meng Hao.

In addition to those, there was another light. Wang Tengfei concentrated for a moment, then was certain it was Han Zong. Unfortunately, the tactical spell could only keep a record of who was in the region of the seven or eight mountains surrounding the black mountain, not their specific location.

Wang Tengfei frowned, and then suddenly noticed that the outline in his head contained... another light!

It was faint, and if he had not looked closely he would have missed it. Without pushing the tactical spell to the breaking point, to the limits of its power, he wouldn’t have been able to sense it.

“This is...” His heart trembled, and he concentrated, but even as he did so, his body shook and he coughed up blood. The tactical spell shattered. Pieces of it shot out, hitting both him and the walls of the Immortal’s cave.

His face white, he coughed up more blood, looking incredibly afraid. When sensing that last light, his mind had begun to tremble, as if whoever it belonged to could crush him to death with a single thought.

The tactical spell could only give him an approximate feeling regarding Qi level, not the target's Cultivation Base. But for the Qi level to cause such a reaction left him frightened beyond belief.

"Who was that?!" said Wang Tengfei, shaking. His fear left him certain that this fearsome person was definitely the one who could so easily rip away his Blood Spot sense.

His heart cold, he lifted his head and breathed deeply. After some time passed, he had recovered his senses. But the memory of that faint light pressed down on him with the weight of a mountain.

"How did this person know about the black mountain affair...? Could it be that they have been following me in my search...? Who was it...?"

Time passed, and eventually the dream ended. Meng Hao opened his eyes, unsure how many days had passed, nor of how his Cultivation Base had changed. He felt as if he had been dreaming for a very long time.

When the dream concluded, Meng Hao felt as if he had more memories than before, memories that were vague and ancient, and couldn't be recalled. But that thirst to fly in the sky still flickered powerfully in his mind.

He felt certain that if one day he could really fly through the heavens, then the memories in his head would become clear.

After some time passed, Meng Hao took a breath, his vision slowly returning to normal. As his senses returned, he felt his Cultivation Base, then stopped, dumbfounded.

"The sixth level of Qi Condensation?" His eyes glittered fiercely, and after thoroughly examining his Cultivation Base, he nearly went mad with joy. He sensed the majestic Core lake, and the Demonic Essence floating within, and an amazing feeling began to overcome him.

"I actually reached... the sixth level of Qi Condensation!" He shook as he stood up, then laughed heartily. His laughter echoed throughout the Immortal's cave.

Excitedly, he sat back down cross-legged, closing his eyes and casting his senses about. It seemed as if he could feel everything around him in complete detail. In fact, he suddenly heard Fatty's voice outside.

"Meng Hao, you were cursed with ill luck. You took the pill, but I didn't want that to hurt you. Please don't come haunt me..."

"Poor old Master Fatty, I'm actually more cursed than you. Did you know that our business is gone? It was stolen away." Fatty squatted outside the Immortal's cave in front of a small fire, his face pained as he burned yellow paper money.

"Meng Hao, when you become a spirit, you have to come back and help me. Look at how much paper I'm burning for you." Tears streamed down his face as he continued to burn the paper money, weeping and wailing.

"You come from a poor family, but don't worry; I, Master Fatty, am here to take care of you. I'll come burn paper for you every day so that in the next life you'll be able to buy a house and get a wife. You'll finally achieve your goal of being rich.

"Oh, Meng Hao, how could you leave like this..." Fatty's wails grew even louder, as if he were completely heartbroken.

Upon hearing this, a strange expression appeared on Meng Hao's face. He opened his eyes. This was the first time anyone had ever burned yellow paper for him, and he wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. He stood and pushed the main door open with a long creak, then walked out.

As soon as he stepped out, Fatty's loud wails suddenly ceased, and he looked up in astonishment. He straightened, his eyes filled with fear. Then he recognized Meng Hao, and he leaped up, gaping.

Meng Hao looked at Fatty with a strange expression, then gave a light cough and walked over to the nearby stream and began to clean himself off. He had never been so dirty in his entire life. After cleaning off, he put on a fresh green robe, then used a flying sword to trim his hair. Now he felt, and looked, like his old self. He turned and smiled at Fatty.

Chapter 27: The Wind Stirs Again

Fatty stared at Meng Hao, tears streaming down his face. He rushed forward, bawling.

“You’re not dead. Meng Hao, you’re not dead!” cried Fatty as he hugged Meng Hao. “I was so scared these past few days. Everyone said that you had died, and I was so sad. You’re my only friend. What would I do if you died?”

“I thought of fleeing the Sect. I even lost interest in filing my teeth. But if I left, how could I get revenge for you? So I didn’t leave. I swear that I will find a way to help you get vengeance...”

Fatty looked with warm sincerity at Meng Hao, and after speaking for a bit, his tears began to dry up. The two of them sat next to the stream and Meng Hao told him about all the things that had happened in the black mountain, leaving out, of course, the matters regarding the Flying Rain-Dragon and Wang Tengfei. Fatty listened anxiously, and when he heard that Meng Hao had reached the sixth level of Qi Condensation, he gasped, stupefied.

“The sixth level of Qi Condensation...” Fatty looked extremely excited. “Holy crap, you’ve, you’ve... you’ve reached the sixth level of Qi Condensation! The year Elder Sister Xu brought us here, she was at the seventh level. Meng Hao, you really are an Immortal! Can you fly?”

“Fly...” Meng Hao closed his eyes, visualizing the descriptions of the Wind Walking technique from the Qi Condensation manual. It would naturally be easier to perform the technique at the sixth level than at the fifth, but after trying several times, the best he could do was float in the air for a moment before dropping down. Muttering, he continued to try for a while, then took a medicinal pill. Finally, he was able to suspend himself about five inches in the air. Fatty looked on with wide eyes.

Meng Hao suddenly opened his eyes, and they shone brightly. He stood up, then made several laps around the area, moving like the wind. Fatty watched on, breathing heavily.

After moving around like this a few times, Meng Hao began to grow more accustomed to the technique. He slapped his bag of holding and with a flash, a flying sword appeared. It moved down to his feet, and then he shot into the air. Fatty looked shocked, as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"You're flying..." he murmured.

Meng Hao felt incredibly excited. The wind blew against his face as he used the Wind Walking technique to fly with the sword. After about thirty breaths, he began to feel unstable, then started to lose his balance. As this happened, Meng Hao's mind suddenly shook, and a mnemonic appeared in his head.

The mnemonic didn't consist of words, and was fantastically mysterious. It appeared in his mind like an instinct, and as it did, the spiritual energy in his body suddenly began to circulate. He waved his right hand unconsciously, almost like the flapping of a wing. Suddenly, a Wind Blade appeared in front of him!

When the Wind Blade appeared, the flying sword underneath his feet quivered. The Wind Blade shot forward into the jungle, and three lines of trees were instantly sliced in half. A rumbling sound reverberated throughout the vegetation, and Meng Hao tumbled onto the ground.

Fatty was thoroughly astonished, and it took him a while to recover his senses. His face flushed, he looked at Meng Hao with reverence in his eyes.

"You really did it! If I stick with you, who would dare to bully me? And who would dare to mess with our business!" Thinking about this, Fatty suddenly laughed out loud.

Meng Hao closed his eyes and thought excitedly about the Wind Blade. He was intelligent, and realised that it most likely had something to do with the strange dream and the Demonic Core. The mnemonic which had appeared in his head was also connected to the Demonic Core. Suddenly, the shadow of the Winged Rain-Dragon appeared in the Core lake. Meng Hao wanted to give voice to the feelings he felt regarding the Dragon and

being Sovereign of the Heavens, but try as he might, he could not.

“Oh right,” said Fatty, suddenly recalling something. “Special promotion training is beginning in a few days. I heard that there’s a month-long period in which you can sign up. You should join! You’ll definitely be accepted. Then you could be the Reliance Sect’s third Inner Sect disciple! You’ll be super famous!”

“Special promotion training?” Meng Hao looked surprised. He had heard about it before, but back then, his Cultivation Base had been too low, so he hadn’t even considered it. But things were different now. In the entire Reliance Sect, there were only three people at the sixth level of Qi Condensation, including himself. The others were Wang Tengfei and Han Zong. Han Zong had been stuck at the fifth level of Qi Condensation for a long time, but had recently broken through to the sixth.

“I heard that they’re only going to accept one disciple, and everyone is saying that the training was set up specifically for Wang Tengfei. But now you’re at the sixth level, you might be able to succeed.” Fatty really wanted Meng Hao to agree. If he became an Inner Sect disciple, he would easily be able to become a big shot in the Reliance Sect.

Meng Hao hesitated, unsure of what he really wanted to do. He was excited about the prospect, knowing that being an Inner Sect disciple would be different than being in the Outer Sect. After becoming a member of the Inner Sect, no one would be quick to offend him, not even Sect elders. Furthermore, there would be more opportunities for Spirit Stones and medicinal pills. But this was an important matter, and Meng Hao’s Cultivation Base had developed quite rapidly. He needed to consider what others might think, or conjecture. If he attracted too much attention, his losses might outweigh his gains.

He had been a member of the Reliance Sect for almost two years now, and had developed a deep understanding of the phrase “the law of the jungle.” He also knew not to advertise his wealth. And yet, he hadn’t decided not to participate either. Maybe he would go. Although, after everything that had happened in the black mountain, his treasures and medicinal pills were almost completely used up. He would need to restock.

He could not help but think wistfully about the two thousand Spirit Stones.

Twenty days flashed by, and the registration period for the special promotion training was almost over. Not many had signed up. According to Sect Rules, upon registering, one could not leave the main square, but was required to sit in meditation beneath the dragon-carved pillars. No one was allowed to disturb the registrants, either.

Actually, the so-called training was in fact a contest of battle magic. It was said that years ago, the participants went out into the wilds to search for treasures, but with the Reliance Sect in decline, the only way to select who to promote to the Inner Sect was to see who would be victorious with their battle magic.

During that twenty day period, Meng Hao took a trip to the High-Level Public zone, but it was completely empty. Considering the Reliance Sect's decline, Meng Hao could understand why. Once again, he opened up shop outside the Low-Level Public zone.

His return caused quite a big stir, and no one dared to interfere with the business. In fact, during the twenty days, business boomed and he earned quite a few Spirit Stones. Almost every day he was able to duplicated magical items and medicinal pills, which he slowly built up into a new stockpile.

Even though all the magical items and flying swords in his bag of holding were ordinary in nature, he already had nearly a hundred. Thinking back to his fight with Lu Hong, and the events in the black mountain, he now clearly understood the best methods to engage in magical combat. After pondering about this for a while, his eyes glittered. He had just come up with an idea to increase the effectiveness of all his flying swords.

Other than managing the business, most of the remainder of Meng Hao's time was spent researching this method of increasing the power of his flying swords. He performed various tests and eventually came up with a few new techniques, ways to control more swords at the same time. One

of the things he did was change the appearance of various swords to disguise them. Some he purposely scratched and marked up, some he broke the tips off of, and some he painted various colors.

The rest of his time was spent attempting to connect his thoughts to those of the Sovereign of Heaven, the Flying Rain-Dragon. Even though he never succeeded, he found that his Wind Walking technique improved significantly, bringing him gradually closer to the sky.

Time whizzed by and now only two days remained of the registration period for the special promotion training. Meng Hao currently sat at his stall by the Low-Level Public Zone, watching Fatty inside, hawking wares with deep fervor. Suddenly, he turned his head and looked off into the distance. Far down the mountain, he caught sight of someone walked toward him. Every step carried him forward several meters, so he arrived at the plateau very quickly. He appeared to be twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and looked proud and lofty. In front of him, a long strip of yellow paper floated in the air, upon which was written various magical figures. Wisps of black smoke emanated from its surface, curling up and around the young man.

“A talisman...” Meng Hao’s eyes flickered as he examined it. He had read about this type of yellow paper in the Qi Condensation manual. It was a powerful magical item which could be used a limited number of times.

The approaching young man was none other than the second most powerful person in the Outer Sect, Han Zong, who was at the sixth level of Qi Condensation. As soon as he appeared, it caused quite a commotion on the plateau as everyone greeting him with cupped fists.

“Meng Hao,” he said coldly, ignoring everyone else and staring at Meng Hao. “Master Uncle Shangguan has a matter he wishes to discuss with you. Please come with me to see him.”

Meng Hao frowned. Master Uncle Shangguan was no stranger. Whether it was his presence during Individual Pill Distribution or his participation with Wang Tengfei in fighting the Demonic Python, it was clear that he was no ordinary individual.

“What could he want with me?” thought Meng Hao, slowly standing up. “Did he sense something about me?” He knew that the man was one of the Sect’s elder generation. Since he was of the Outer Sect, he could not refuse to comply. If he did, then it would look suspicious.

Muttering, Meng Hao looked at cold Han Zong. He had assumed that if the truth about events that day were revealed, Wang Tengfei would be the first one to come looking for him. Could this summons have something to do with that affair?

Meng Hao’s face was calm, but his head spun and he laughed coldly to himself. With a seemingly casual glance at Fatty, he walked forward.

Moving along with Han Zong, they soon reached the West Mountain. At its peak, the spiritual energy was especially thick. Meng Hao caught sight of an exquisite residence, inside of which a group of young boys were planting Spirit Grass.

Soon they came to a stop in front of a three-story building. Han Zong looked at Meng Hao, and then the voice of Shangguan Xiu boomed out from inside.

“Come in, Meng Hao. Han Zong, you head to the South Mountain.” A jade slip suddenly flew out into Han Zong’s hand. He looked at Meng Hao with a cold laugh, then turned and left.

Meng Hao’s heart began to thump. This didn’t seem right. Shangguan Xiu gave Han Zong a jade slip and sent him to the South Mountain...

Chapter 28: Shangguan Xiu

Time did not permit Meng Hao to spend time thinking. The door to the building swung open silently. Inside was pitch black and emanated a sinister air.

“You still haven’t entered,” said Shangguan Xiu, his voice cold. Meng Hao hesitated, then, eyes flickering dimly, realised that he couldn’t retreat. After thinking about it for a moment, his nervousness grew. He stepped forward into the building.

Inside, rays of light gradually appeared which, though dim, revealed the surroundings. Shangguan Xiu sat there in his golden robe, expressionless, eyes cold as he watched Meng Hao enter.

Almost as soon as he stepped a foot inside, Shangguan Xiu’s eyes suddenly flickered, and he raised his right hand. A needle shot out, stabbed Meng Hao’s finger, then flew back in an instant. All his bags of holding flew away from him too, completely beyond his control, to land in front of Shangguan Xiu.

Some blood remained on the flying needle, which Shangguan Xiu licked.

“There’s no trace of heavenly material or earthly treasures...” Shangguan Xiu frowned. His gaze swept over Meng Hao as if he could see all the secrets he kept. The Demonic Core within Meng Hao stirred, and he did his best to conceal this from Shangguan Xiu.

Meng Hao’s face fell, revealing a terrified expression. He opened his mouth but didn’t seem to know what to say.

With another frown, Shangguan Xiu opened one of Meng Hao’s bags of holding. He rummaged around a bit, not even glancing at the large quantity of flying swords. It seemed as if he didn’t even notice the copper mirror. After finding nothing unusual, his frown deepened.

“Master Uncle Shangguan, what... what are you looking for?” His face was covered with terror, but inside he laughed coldly. He had long since made preparations for such an event. The wooden sword, along with most

of his Spirit Stones and medicinal pills, were in Fatty's safe keeping, hidden away.

"Let me ask you," said Shangguan Xiu, his gaze falling like lightning upon Meng Hao, "How did your Cultivation Base progress so rapidly?"

"Elder Sister Xu and Grand Elder Ouyang have been watching out for me," he replied, beginning to tremble. "They gave me some medicinal pills..." He pretended to force himself to try to be calm, but inside he wasn't worried. It didn't seem he had been asked here because of what had happened with Wang Tengfei, but rather because of his rapid progress in cultivation.

Shangguan Xiu frowned again. He obviously knew that Grand Elder Ouyang had taken a liking to Meng Hao, otherwise he would not have been so mild in his inquiries.

Just then, Han Zong's voice drifted in from outside.

"Reporting back to Master Uncle Shangguan. Meng Hao's Immortal's Cave is empty."

"You may leave," replied Shangguan Xiu. He sat in contemplation for a moment as Han Zong departed. He stared wordlessly at Meng Hao.

Time gradually passed, and soon it was evening. Meng Hao's countenance grew more and more nervous and filled with fear. Finally, he spoke, trembling: "Master Uncle..."

"Very well, you may go," said Shangguan Xiu with a wave of his hand. He looked irritated.

Meng Hao stood, saluted with cupped fists, and left, feeling relieved. After reaching the bottom of the mountain, his speed increased as he raced toward the South Mountain.

As Meng Hao left, Shangguan Xiu's expression changed. He lifted up the silver needle and examined it carefully, licking more blood off of it. His eyes glittered.

"Something's not right. This blood has large amounts Qi from Low-Level

Demonic Cores. I didn't notice it before because I was concentrating on Grand Elder Ouyang's potential influence. But now that the blood has dried, it's clear. He must have consumed hundreds of Demonic Cores. Where could he possibly get his hands on so many? This Meng Hao must be keeping some secret." Killing intent filled Shangguan Xiu's eyes, and his body leaped into the air in pursuit of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao sped along at high speed, feeling relieved, but also jumpy. He arrived outside the South Mountain Immortal's Cave, and as he approached, he saw Fatty stick his head out of the trees in the distance. Catching sight of Meng Hao, he ran over.

"I was scared to death," said Fatty, letting out a relieved sigh. "Meng Hao, you were gone the whole afternoon..." He took out the bag of holding Meng Hao had given him. "Thankfully no one noticed that I kept this hidden away."

With a dignified expression, Meng Hao nodded and accepted the bag of holding. And yet, as soon as he laid hands on it, a whistling scream could be heard some distance away. A rainbow seemed to be approaching, within which could be seen an old man wearing a golden robe. It was none other than Shangguan Xiu.

He was flying! Only Cultivation monks who had Established their Foundation could fly. With the assistance of magical items, one could glide for a bit, like Elder Sister Xu, but this was not true flight.

Seeing this, Meng Hao's heart shook. He watched his opponent flying down from the top of the mountain. He moved with a speed similar to Meng Hao's when he borrowed momentum from flying swords.

Shangguan Xiu immediately caught sight of Fatty handing the bag of holding over to Meng Hao, and his eyes flashed. Without a word, he shot toward Meng Hao, certain that he would be able to grab him. Today, he would learn Meng Hao's secret. Perhaps this secret would be of great assistance to himself.

Meng Hao's expression changed, and his emotions spun. But the situation was urgent, and he didn't have time to think. He put away the

bag of holding and grabbed Fatty. Then he leaped up, and a flying sword circulated around him to land underneath his feet. He shot off into the distance.

It happened so fast that Shangguan Xiu's pupils constricted. He let out a cold snort and flew off in pursuit.

Fatty was so scared that his face was white. But he didn't move, afraid that he might distract Meng Hao. He trusted that Meng Hao would not abandon him.

Actually, this was very true. Meng Hao was not that type of person. He knew that if he dropped Fatty, he might be able to move a bit faster. But he also knew that Shangguan Xiu would then vent his wrath on Fatty.

"Dammit. To this guy, Outer Sect disciples are like ants, only Inner Sect disciples are true cultivators of the Reliance Sect."

Gnashing his teeth, he looked back at Shangguan Xiu, who was getting closer and closer, while Meng Hao dropped closer and closer to the ground. He wouldn't be able to keep going much longer. He pushed forward as fast as possible, sweat breaking out on his forehead, his mind racing. He saw the Outer Sect up ahead, and suddenly he had a flash of inspiration. He knew what to do.

His eyes shining, he leaped down to the ground, dashing into the Outer Sect. Then, regardless of the effect on his Cultivation Base, he gritted his teeth and once again leaped onto a flying sword. A whistling scream reverberated out, causing nearby Outer Sect disciples to crane their necks, dumbstruck.

Shangguan Xiu's face grew dark. With a flick of a sleeve, he darted straight toward Meng Hao. The distance between the two grew closer and closer. When it reached roughly ten meters, Shangguan Xiu's face suddenly changed as he realized where Meng Hao was heading. By then, it was too late to stop him.

Meng Hao approached the Outer Sect square, with its dragon-carved columns. On the tall platform, Grand Elder Ouyang sat in meditation. Beneath him in the square, Wang Tengfei also sat cross-legged,

meditating.

This was the registration location for the special promotion training!

“I want to sign up!” cried Meng Hao as soon as he entered the square.

“Me too!” shouted Fatty, the blood draining from his face.

Shangguan Xiu stopped in his tracks, just outside the square. Murder filled his eyes, but it quickly disappeared, replaced with a genial smile. Grand Elder Ouyang had opened his eyes. He looked at Meng Hao, surprised by his Cultivation Base. He gave Meng Hao a look of praise.

Wang Tengfei also opened his eyes, seemingly completely uninterested in Meng Hao.

“Now that you have signed up,” said Grand Elder Ouyang coolly, “you must remain confined to this area. Training begins in two days.” His gaze swept over Shangguan Xiu, whose heart subsequently sank. Making his smile look even more amiable, he looked at Meng Hao, false praise in his eyes.

Meng Hao looked back at him, and when their gazes met Shangguan Xiu’s fury boiled. He could do nothing about it, though, so after a long moment he laughed and walked off.

Not much time passed before Han Zong strode up. He entered the square, glaring at Meng Hao. With a sneering laugh, he declared that he was registering.

As he walked past Meng Hao, he whispered, “You offended Shangguan Xiu. I dare you to stay here! The Inner Sect training is where you will reap death.”

Meng Hao’s eyes flashed as he stared coldly at Han Zong’s retreating back.

After that, the deadline for registration approached. Before Meng Hao had arrived, only Wang Tengfei had signed up. Then Han Zong arrived. Now, four more people entered the square.

They were no strangers to Meng Hao. Yin Tianlong and Zhou Kai were

present. The other two each appeared to over thirty years of age. One of them was tall and stalwart, the other skinny and frail, with hideous scars on his face. Both emanated desolate auras of death. These were the other two members of the sect who were of the fifth level of Qi condensation.

The four of them entered the square, casting dark looks toward Meng Hao and Fatty. The aggressive killing intent in their eyes was impossible to conceal.

Fatty started to get nervous, and Meng Hao narrowed his eyes. Now he knew the power of Shangguan Xiu's influence.

Time passed slowly, and soon two days had passed. Now, only one hour remained until the registration period was over. The square was already surrounded by numerous Outer Sect disciples. They hadn't come to sign up, but to watch the Inner Sect special promotion training, to maybe learn something, and to watch Wang Tengfei in all his glory.

Of course, there were eight people in the square, including Fatty, with his low Cultivation Base.

Even as the sound of discussions buzzed, the time limit was reached. The sound of bells filled the entire Reliance Sect. They rang in succession, nine times, after which Grand Elder Ouyang opened his eyes and looked out at the eight people before him. He flicked his wide sleeve, and the large platform glowed with many colors then expanded outward until it encompassed a diameter of roughly one hundred meters.

He waved his right hand again, and eight jade slips flew out, toward each of the eight people. When the slips descended in front of each of them, they could see that numbers were inscribed onto their surfaces, from one to eight.

"Forfeiting before a battle is prohibited," said Grand Elder Ouyang coolly. "In the competition for promotion to the Inner Sect, life and death are predestined. If, after stepping onto the platform, you feel you cannot win, you may admit defeat. First match, numbers one and eight." Wang Tengfei opened his eyes, and raised up his jade slip, upon which was written 'one.' He stood and floated up to stand on the platform. The wind

gently lifted his long hair. Clad in his snow-white robe, he looked perfect, beautiful, gentle and refined. He smiled. This caused all the surrounding Cultivation monks to let out a cheer. What none of them could see, however, was that beneath Wang Tengfei's smile was concealed the bitter pain of loss and defeat.

At that moment, Shangguan Xiu appeared in the crowd, glaring menacingly at Meng Hao.

Chapter 29: Inner Sect Training

Yin Tianlong's face fell as he looked at the character 'eight' on the jade slip in front of him. Hands behind his back, he used his Wind Walking technique to float up onto the platform.

The moment his feet touched down, Wang Tengfei lifted his right foot, and suddenly the entire platform began to vibrate with a loud hum, as if some sort of blast was accumulating from all corners. Wang Tengfei didn't move, but the massive invisible force shot toward Yin Tianlong.

When he saw this, Yin Tianlong's face changed. Wang Tengfei had not even moved, yet the massive pressure bearing down on Yin Tianlong was already making it difficult for him to circulate his spiritual energy.

"I admit defeat..." he said immediately and without hesitation. Apparently, he didn't want to hear any comments about his decision. Saluting deeply with cupped hands, he leaped off the platform and left the square.

Grand Elder Ouyang remained expressionless. Slowly, he spoke again: "Wang Tengfei is victorious. Second match: numbers two and seven."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Fatty looked at the character 'two' written on his jade slip and began to tremble. At the same time, the scar-faced Cultivation monk of the fifth level of Qi Condensation glared coldly at him, then stepped onto the platform.

"Just walk up and then admit defeat," Meng Hao said to him in a low voice, pushing him forward. Fatty's ball-like body flew up onto the platform.

As soon as he landed, he immediately said: "Admit defeat..." He dared not speak three words, only two, and yet the scar-faced Cultivation monk's eyes flickered with murderous intent. Before Fatty could finish speaking, he lifted up his hand. A flying sword shot screaming toward Fatty at incredible speed. By the time Fatty said 'admit,' it was half a meter from his throat.

By the time it was obvious what was happening, it was too late. Meng Hao's face changed and he shot to his feet. At the same time, Grand Elder Ouyang flicked an object out with his fingers. Right before the flying sword penetrated Fatty's throat, a ringing sound could be heard and the sword flew away. Fatty was left with a small nick on his neck.

Fatty took a step back, his face pale. Then he jumped down and returned to Meng Hao, so scared that his legs were like rubber. He had never before experienced the closeness of death in such a way.

Meng Hao looked at the line of blood on Fatty's neck, and a murderous look appeared in his eyes. His opponent had attacked with extreme ruthlessness and an obvious desire to kill. Were Meng Hao his opponent that would have been fine, but Fatty's Cultivation Base was too low. To attack him in such a way was going too far.

Looking around, Meng Hao caught sight of Shangguan Xiu standing in the distance, his grim face filled with murder. Flames of fury burst out in Meng Hao's heart. He had never done anything to offend Master Uncle Shangguan; Master Uncle Shangguan was the aggressor, the one who attacked with deadly force.

In all his years in the Reliance Sect, Meng Hao had never revealed an intense desire to kill. But now, his eyes shone with clear killing intent.

What had just happened was so obviously fishy that even the surrounding Cultivation monks could tell. One after another, they began to look at Meng Hao. Discussions broke out.

"Next match, numbers three and six," said Grand Elder Ouyang with a frown.

Han Zong stood, the number three jade slip in his hand. As he walked past Meng Hao, he whispered, "You offended Master Uncle Shangguan. You won't be the only one to die today. Your friend will die too." You could say that other than a Grand Elder, Shangguan Xiu was the most powerful and influential member of the Sect.

Because of the decline of the Reliance Sect, its numbers were few. The chaos of the Sect rules, and mutual slaughter among the Outer Sect

disciples, all of this, was because the Reliance Sect was at the end of an era, and just wasn't like it used to be.

There were fewer medicinal pills, so how could they be distributed fairly... There were not many Spirit Condensation pills, so of course they became objects of deadly struggle between the disciples who wished to consume them.

So, let there be chaos. Every man for himself. Whether it be members of the first level of Qi Condensation or the fifth, let chaos rule, and death. There was no fairness here; life and death were determined by destiny. There were no sermons, no one giving instruction on how to practice cultivation. There was only the Qi Condensation manual. Whether you were a worm or a dragon, you could only rely on your luck. If you succeeded, you lived. If you failed, you died. Good luck meant life, bad luck, death.

Whoever could kill their way to the end of the path would become an Inner Sect disciple, and then be a true member of the Reliance Sect and Elder Ouyang's true student.

In the past, Sect Leader He Luohua had been focused on making the Sect more powerful. But weighed down by the pressures of reality, he had completely exhausted himself, and had long since hidden away in seclusion. Grand Elder Ouyang had a soft personality, and as far as his cultivation went, he was in his later years of longevity, with not much time left. Therefore, he didn't have much energy to spend time on the Sect.

Among the Inner Sect disciples, Elder Sister Xu was usually in meditative seclusion. With her cold personality, she didn't pay much attention to Sect affairs. Elder Brother Chen was primarily focused on the Dao, and didn't participate in Sect matters. Circumstances as such, only Shangguan Xiu remained.

His Cultivation Base was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and he was ninety years of age. He had served the Sect well, and could not help but become the Master Uncle to the disciples of the Sect. But the Sect was in decline. Were this some other Sect, considering he was still in the Qi

Condensation stage, he would never be called Master Uncle.

Meng Hao watched Han Zong as he flashed up onto the platform. His opponent was Zhou Kai, and it seemed this would be no life and death battle. Zhou Kai immediately admitted defeat, and the match was over.

The last match of the first round had arrived. Meng Hao stood and flew up onto the platform. His opponent was the tall, strong man who had a Qi Condensation of the fifth level. His aura radiated murder, and from the look of him, he had experienced many bloody battles.

He looked at Meng Hao and growled, running straight toward him, his body expanding. He raised his hand, and instantly, a shining battle-ax appeared. This was clearly no ordinary object.

His face dark, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding. A swift, sharp flying sword appeared and shot forward. But by the time it was about half a meter away from the big man, a soft shield appeared, blocking the flying sword.

“You’re gonna die today!” said the big man with a hideous grin. Before coming to the training, Shangguan Xiu had given him a magical item. Even if Meng Hao’s Cultivation Base was a bit higher than his, he didn’t have anything to worry about.

“Boom,” said Meng Hao coolly, his facial expression the same as ever. The flying sword exploded with a bang, sending the big man flying backwards. The shield in front of him flickered, preventing him from being injured.

Laughing, he charged again. But Meng Hao was faster. He dashed forward, slapping his bag of holding. Two flying swords appeared, shot forward and then exploded. The blast reverberated, and the shield bent. The big man’s face changed, and before he could even react, four more flying sword shot forth. A massive explosion rang out, and the shield was ripped to pieces. The attack stabbed through, directly into the big man’s chest. He let out a miserable cry and spat out a mouthful of blood.

Before his body could hit the ground, another flying sword shot forth from Meng Hao, glittering as it stabbed into the man’s throat. He fell

twitching to the ground in a pool of blood, dead.

Since entering the Sect, Meng Hao had not killed very many people. But this time he had slain the man with vicious ruthlessness. He floated down from the platform, giving Han Zong a cold glance.

“Next, you die,” he said, sitting down cross-legged and closing his eyes.

Han Zong’s pupils constricted and his killing intent grew stronger.

A buzz of discussion rose from the surrounding Cultivation monks as they recovered from watching the scene. They had been shaken by its bloodiness.

“Meng Hao is victorious. The first match of round two is Wang Tengfei and Xu Ge.” Grand Elder Ouyang’s voice was cool, as if he hadn’t even noticed the reek of blood in the air.

Xu Ge was the Cultivation Monk who had tried to kill Fatty moments ago. As soon as he stepped foot on the platform, he admitted defeat. Giving Wang Tengfei a respectful salute, he turned and left the square as quickly as possible.

At this point, everyone could see that be it Han Zong or the four Cultivation monks of the fifth level, their goal was not to be promoted, but rather to kill Meng Hao.

“Match two, Meng Hao and Han Zong.” Grand Elder Ouyang looked intently at Meng Hao, and as soon as he finished speaking, silence prevailed. Everyone stared at Meng Hao and Han Zong.

Meng Hao looked as somber as ever as he stepped onto the platform. Han Zong arrived at almost exactly the same time. No introductory remarks were necessary. They both attacked at the same time.

A thunderous sound rang out as three flying swords appeared, circling around Meng Hao. A shield appeared, revolving around Han Zong, and in front of him appeared a glowing, five-colored

banner. It instantly swept toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao said nothing. As the five-colored banner approached, he

didn't retreat. He lifted his left hand, and instantly, a five-meter long Flame Serpent appeared. It roared and flew forward. The Flame Serpent didn't appear to be just a snake, but more like a python. Blistering heat radiated out from it as it flew.

At the same time, Meng Hao's right hand slapped his bag of holding; six flying swords appeared and shot forward.

Han Zong laughed coldly, his eyes shining with murderous intent. He took a step forward, then slapped his left hand onto the ground. When he stood, a deep rumble could be heard, and the entire platform began to shake. In front of him suddenly appeared a Stone Golem, approximately one meter tall. With a roar, the Stone Golem charged forward at incredible speed. When it slammed into the Flame Serpent, a massive explosion thundered across the platform.

Amidst the roar, the five-colored banner shot forward, approaching Meng Hao's flying swords. Han Zong's eyes glittered brightly.

"Five Radiances Art!"

As soon as the words were out of Han Zong's mouth, the five-colored banner suddenly shook, and then began to shine brightly in all directions. A two-colored stream of mist shot out from it, transforming into two Spirit creatures, who charged toward Meng Hao with shrill screams. The second of the two Mist Spirits was only partly visible; obviously because of his Cultivation Base level, Han Zong was limited in his ability to use this art.

As soon as the two-colored Mist Spirits appeared, the surrounding Cultivation monks cried out in astonishment.

"That's Master Uncle Shangguan's consummate Five Radiances Art! They say it's one of the most powerful arts for Sect members who haven't Perfected their Foundations. Brother Han Zong can only summon two of the colors!"

"So Han Zong can use this art! Yeah, it must be because of that banner. Could it be a magic item provided by Master Uncle Shangguan?"

Emitting shrill, ear-piercing cries, the two-colored Mist Spirits shot

toward Meng Hao with irresistible force. The moment his six flying swords touched them, the swords shattered into pieces.

Chapter 30: Kill Han Zong, Battle Wang Tengfei!

Standing in the square beneath the platform, Shangguan Xiu's lips twisted with a grim smile. He didn't care at all whether Meng Hao lived or died. He only wanted the treasures within in Meng Hao's bag of holding.

After Meng Hao had registered for the Inner Sect promotion training, he had gone to find Zhou and Yin to inquire after the events which had occurred in the black mountain. He knew that Meng Hao had provoked masses of Demonic beasts with some supposed Demonic magic.

Shangguan Xiu was convinced that it was no Demonic magic, but rather a magical treasure.

Meng Hao's eyes narrowed. He watched the two-colored Mist Spirits approaching. He raised his left hand and waved it in front of him. An invisible Wind Blade appeared and shot toward the Mist Spirits at high speed.

At the same time, Meng Hao quickly swallowed a handful of Demonic Cores, then slapped his bag of holding and flicked his sleeve. A stream of sword auras flew from the bag. In the blink of an eye, twenty had appeared, filling the air. It was quite shocking. The swords also shot toward the two-colored Mist Spirits.

Many of the flying swords appeared to be in bad condition or of different colors.

Upon seeing this, the surrounding Cultivation monks gasped with astonishment, but before they could even begin to discuss the matter amongst themselves, the Wind Blade reached the Mist Spirits, and a bang rang out. The Mist Spirits vibrated. Then, the flying swords hit, and two miserable shrieks could be heard. The two-colored Mist Spirits were extraordinary, but there were just too many swords.

The Mist Spirits were torn to pieces, and the swords continued on to slash into the five-colored banner. A massive explosion occurred and the

banner disintegrated, along with about half of the swords. Han Zong watched on, stupefied. Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding, swallowing another Demonic Core and produced ten more flying swords, which shot forward.

Han Zong had never imagined Meng Hao would have so many flying swords. He retreated backwards, waving his right hand. A shining, two-layered shield appeared around him. But he was still concerned. The hairs on his body stood on end, and his skin felt numb. He knew that life and death hung in the balance here. His right hand moved again, and a jade pendant appeared in front of him, adding another layer of shielding around him. With three shields in place, he felt a bit better.

Then, the Sword Rain descended. Sword auras flashed ceaselessly. They slammed over and over into the first shield layer, and it shattered almost immediately. Shortly after that, the second shield layer broke into pieces, unable withstand the Sword Rain.

“How can he have so many flying swords!?” Han Zong’s pupils constricted, and he looked terrified. He retreated further.

In the blink of an eye, the third shield fell apart, and the jade pendant split into pieces, unable to hold up against the multitude of swords. And then the sword rain descended upon Han Zong, and he screamed. Sword after sword stabbed into him. They lifted his corpse up into the air, then slammed it back down onto the platform. He twitched a few times, then rattled out his final breath. He had so many swords sticking into him that he looked like a hedgehog. Everyone watching gasped, their faces filled with astonishment.

“How... how.. how can there be so many flying swords!?”

“So many flying swords, no wonder he owns a shop. A few days ago I saw him sell at least ten! He hasn’t just been selling medicinal pills, recently. He’s also been selling magical items.”

“Meng Hao must have had some sort of windfall. His Cultivation Base has grown incredibly fast. Maybe he obtained a bunch of treasures in some sort of adventure.” The buzz of discussion filled the air, and as it did,

Shangguan Xiu frowned, his face dark.

Meng Hao stood on the platform, face pale. He still had some spiritual energy left. His attacks, especially the last one involved twenty flying swords, had quickly drained him. He was only at the sixth level of Qi Condensation, after all. Fortunately, he had been consuming Demonic Cores throughout the battle to replenish himself. This made his attacks even more effective. Meng Hao had invented this fighting method himself, and was quite familiar with it, having practiced it often.

He waved his right hand, and the swords lifted up from Han Zong's body and returned to him, dripping blood along the way. They circled around his body before returning to his bag of holding.

He descended from the platform and sat down cross-legged next to Fatty. He popped a Demonic Core into his mouth and felt it dissolve. He didn't care if people saw him consuming so many. As far as they were concerned, after the affair at the black mountain, he should have been able to acquire quite a few Demonic Cores.

Furthermore, he had another battle to be concerned about. The humiliation he had endured under Wang Tengfei's four finger attacks would be repaid today in full measure. He had been waiting for this day a long time!

Grand Elder Ouyang looked at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with obvious approval. His admiration of Meng Hao had continued to grow from the day he entered the Sect. In his eyes, Meng Hao was growing up. His face radiated contentment.

Grand Elder Ouyang didn't care what stroke of luck Meng Hao had. As a Cultivation monk, good luck was a blessing dictated by fate. He especially liked people who were blessed with luck. His smile filled with kindness, but inside, he felt regret and nervousness.

"Regardless of who lives or dies in the battles of the Inner Sect training, Wang Tengfei's latent talent is something rarely seen in the span of a hundred years. His Cultivation Base is extraordinary at this young age. If he manages to perfect his foundation, he will be a talent rarely seen even

during the Sect's glory days. Meng Hao just isn't a match for him...." He sighed.

Standing there in the crowd, Shangguan Xiu's face grew even grimmer. He narrowed his eyes.

He had never imagined that Meng Hao would be able to defeat Han Zong, especially since he'd bestowed a powerful treasure to him. The power of the Mist Spirits summoned by the five-colored banner should have been able to destroy Meng Hao with no problem.

And yet Meng Hao's dozens of flying swords had ripped it to shreds. Even Shangguan Xiu had been shocked to see so many flying swords. Even though they were Low-Level swords, they were still sharp. Even scrap iron in such large numbers could shock and amaze.

At this moment, far away on the East Mountain, stood a middle-aged man of approximately forty years of age. He wore a black robe and had the look of a scholar. As he watched the battle unfold in the Outer Sect square, his eyes filled with strange light and came to focus on Meng Hao.

"This kid... He wasn't worth noticing before. His latent talent is nothing out of the ordinary, but he seems to possess extraordinary luck." This man was none other than the incredibly powerful Sect Leader He Luohua, who had already Formed his Core.

"If he wasn't up against Wang Tengfei, this kid might be able to join the Inner Sect. But it's Wang Tengfei... it will be difficult." He Luohua watched Meng Hao with kind eyes. As a Cultivation monk with a Core, and the Sect Leader of the Reliance Sect, he didn't pay much attention to the twists of fate and luck that occurred amongst disciples who still practiced Qi Condensation. Things would play out naturally.

If a disciple was lucky, then he would be happy. But with Wang Tengfei present, He Luohua didn't give much stock to Meng Hao's chances to gain victory.

"It's too bad there are only three pieces of Vorpall Jade... Wang Tengfei's spot was decided upon long ago, otherwise..." He Luohua shook his head, trying to decide whether or not to intervene if it seemed Meng Hao would

die. He sighed.

Time slipped by. Grand Elder Ouyang watched on in approval as Meng Hao's spiritual energy slowly restored. He was clearly showing partiality to Meng Hao, but none of the onlookers dared say anything.

As for Wang Tengfei, he didn't pay attention to anyone. Even though Meng Hao's rapid advancement in Cultivation Base was astounding, Wang Tengfei didn't think about it too much because of Grand Elder Ouyang's intervention that time. Deep in Wang Tengfei's heart, he didn't think or even consider it possible that Meng Hao could be the person who took his treasures. He was convinced that it was the other dim light he had seen.

Thinking of this, Wang Tengfei's heart throbbed with pain, and he nearly wept tears of blood. As of now, the Legacy had nothing to do with him. He could not sense even a sliver of it. He was an outsider as far as it was concerned. Even if the person who now possessed it stood in front of him, he would have no idea.

"The Legacy is no longer mine, but the treasure..." Wang Tengfei's hands clenched into fists. He had only been able to catch a glimpse of the sword from a distance. Other than that, he had only been able to read about it in the ancient records. He didn't even know what it could do. He only knew that the ancient records stated clearly that the sword was one of a kind, and that its spiritual power could overwhelm everything in heaven and earth.

He had planned to thoroughly study it after acquiring it, but now... all of that was just wishful thinking.

Wang Tengfei closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Sitting there cross-legged, he appeared as mild and gentle as ever, as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"I am Wang Tengfei. Even though the Legacy and the treasure were stolen away, the Reliance Inner Sect belongs to me. It is the second of my main goals. Even without the treasure or Legacy, I will join the detestable Inner Sect of the Reliance Sect. That will be my fortune!

"One defeat is nothing! I am Wang Tengfei!" On the outside he was

peaceful and calm, so he forced himself to be equally calm on the inside, to emerge from the depths of defeat.

He was arrogant because he was Wang Tengfei, a perfect, blessed god, Chosen by heaven.

He was indifferent because he knew that the Inner Sect training had been opened especially for him, and was merely a show, carried out simply to comply with Sect Rules. From the moment he had entered the Reliance Sect, he was different. To the members of the Outer Sect, he had long since already become a member of the Inner Sect.

He was calm because he didn't care a bit about the Reliance Sect. A small Sect like this meant nothing to him. Even a single member of his clan could lay waste to the entire Sect. Were it not for his insistence to come to this backwater State of Zhao, he would never be here. Not considering his status. He should be shaking heaven and earth back home in his powerful clan.

So he was arrogant, indifferent and calm. He let the time pass, allowing this person whose name he could not even remember to recover his Cultivation Base.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, and then Meng Hao suddenly opened his eyes. They glittered with the desire for battle. He had killed a man of the fifth level of Qi Condensation. He had killed Han Zong. Never before had he killed so many people in one day. But his heart filled with anticipation. He would place Wang Tengfei underfoot and repay in full the humiliation he had endured that day.

Without a word, Meng Hao slowly stood up.

Chapter 31: Fight!

“Final match of the training,” said Grand Elder Ouyang, looking encouragingly at Meng Hao. “Meng Hao and Wang Tengfei. The victor shall be promoted to the Inner Sect.”

Everyone stared at Meng Hao as he leapt up onto the platform. Wang Tengfei opened his eyes and casually stepped up. Conversations erupted amongst the Outer Sect disciples.

“Meng Hao really dares to step onto the platform. His Cultivation Base is pretty good, and he did kill Han Zong, but this is Elder Brother Wang he’s fighting. He really doesn’t know his own limitations.”

“There will always be stumbling blocks on the path to power. This is just a little pebble that Elder Brother Wang has to walk over on his rise to the top.”

“I remember when he snatched a magical item that Elder Brother Wang had given someone as a gift. When Elder Brother Wang took it back, he was like an ant in front of him.” Conversations filled the air, filled with ridicule. It wasn’t that everyone felt great enmity towards Meng Hao, but rather, in their hearts, Elder Brother Wang was someone you just didn’t mess with.

“If he dies under Wang Tengfei’s hand, it won’t be easy to get his bag of holding,” thought Shangguan Xiu, frowning. He looked at Meng Hao.

Even as everyone in the crowd sneered at Meng Hao, once again putting him at odds against the world, suddenly, a shrill, clear voice suddenly rang out.

“Go Meng Hao! You’re gonna win! The next Inner Sect disciple will definitely be Meng Hao!” It was Fatty, shouting out from down in the square in his cracking, teenage voice.

The jumble of voices reached Meng Hao, but they seemed very far away. He stood there calmly, staring coldly at Wang Tengfei. Meng Hao knew that from the moment he had entered the world of Cultivation until now,

he had never faced a more powerful opponent. This would be his most difficult battle yet.

But he wouldn't shrink back. He would fight. He would attack. There are some things in life that a man must do, because of dignity.

The scene from that day continued to play out in his head, and he absentmindedly rubbed his bag of holding.

Inside were the ten blood-stained fingernails he'd plucked out of his palms.

Wang Tengfei stood there calmly, giving a cool look to Meng Hao. His eyes were placid, as if he were looking down at an insect. He looked just like he did that year.

He waved his right hand as if he were flicking away a bug, and in front of him a spinning Whirlwind appeared, about as tall as a person. It whirled towards Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's eyes gleamed. He had nothing to say to Wang Tengfei. Everything he wanted to say could be said with swords, magic, and this most fierce battle in all his 18 years of life.

He stepped forward, lifting his right hand and sending a Wind Blade screaming toward the Whirlwind. It radiated a savage wind as it flew forward.

Fight!

He slapped his bag of holding, and twenty flying swords flew out in a line. Some seemed to be bent, unable to fly straight, but their sword auras glittered blindingly. He lifted a finger on his right hand and pointed. The twenty flying swords became a rainbow as they shot with immense power directly toward Wang Tengfei.

Fight!

The dazzling sword auras were like rain, and as their combined power shot toward Wang Tengfei, the Whirlwind slammed into them. An explosion reverberated through the air as the Whirlwind was torn open.

The flying swords, now directionless, were suddenly sucked up into the Whirlwind. From a distance, it looked as if the Whirlwind had transformed into a vortex of swords. But the Whirlwind was growing weaker, and looked as if it would fall apart at any moment.

Wang Tengfei's expression didn't change in the least. He walked forward, and the power of his Cultivation Base, at the peak of the sixth level of Qi Condensation, burst forth, forming into an unprecedented spiritual pressure. The fingers of his right hand moved in incantation patterns, and a thin, sparkling strand of water shot toward Meng Hao.

This was not a technique of the Reliance Sect, but rather Wang Tengfei's clan.

Seeing this, Meng Hao unhesitatingly popped a Demonic Core into his mouth. With his left hand, he called back the flying swords from within the vortex. They flew back to him unsteadily. With his right hand, he formed movements with his fingers to summon a Flame Python, several meters long. It charged toward the Water Thread, roaring so loud that it seemed as if a tempest had struck.

"Water-Wind, slay!" said Wang Tengfei. Although he didn't look scornful, his calm expression was the same as it had been that day when he almost crippled Meng Hao's Cultivation Base, confident and filled with disregard.

As soon as the words left his mouth, the glittered Water Thread melded with the Whirlwind to form a massive, rapidly spinning column which then dropped down toward Meng Hao.

The twenty flying swords spun to block the descending column, and a boom rang out as the swords scattered. Some of them even broke to pieces. Meng Hao had already retreated to the edge of the platform. In front of him remained a large stain of water as wide as a hand and approximately three meters long, frightening in appearance.

A line of blood appeared between Meng Hao's eyebrows. It slowly oozed down his nose, giving him an even more savage appearance.

Twenty flying swords had been able to shake Han Zong, but this was

Wang Tengfei, and he hadn't even used any magical items yet, merely some techniques that Meng Hao had never seen before. Thankfully, Meng Hao had been able to evade death. Were his Cultivation Base at the fifth level of Qi Condensation, he would not have been able to dodge.

"Wang Tengfei has powerful latent talent," thought Shangguan Xiu, "and has a lot of experience using the powers and abilities of Qi Condensation. Even someone of the seventh level would have a tough time with him. Meng Hao is definitely going to die." His frown deepened as he looked at Meng Hao, and his eyes shone with murder. However, he still didn't know how he would retrieve Meng Hao's bag of holding after he died.

Wang Tengfei seemed as calm as ever when Meng Hao evaded his attack. It was as his attack had been a mere afterthought. If an elephant wants to crush an ant, and its first step misses, the second will not. He gave a beautiful, indifferent smile then took another step forward, raising his right hand and waving a finger toward Meng Hao.

As soon as he waved his finger, Meng Hao heard a buzz from the surrounding audience. It reminded him of that day when he had stood against the world. Wang Tengfei had used one finger attack to bind him, one to destroy his jade pendant, one to take away the gourd bottle, and one to attempt to cripple his Cultivation Base.

A powerful fighting spirit shone in Meng Hao's eyes. He had been humiliated by Wang Tengfei's finger attack, but he was a different person today. Even though he hadn't made up his mind to register for the Inner Sect training, but had rather been forced to sign up by circumstances, he had been prepared to do so for some time. In the past month, most of his time had been spent learning how to sacrifice a bit of dexterity to be able to control large amounts of flying swords.

As Wang Tengfei's finger descended, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding, consumed a Demonic Core, and then began moving his fingers in incantation patterns. Suddenly, the ten or so remaining flying swords began to tremble, then suddenly lifted off the ground and flew back toward him from all directions.

They rotated around his body, and he lowered his hands, then pointed toward Wang Tengfei. The flying swords shot out with shocking speed, screaming toward Wang Tengfei.

At the same time, more flying swords appeared from within his bag of holding, until his limit was reached. There seemed to be enough to break down a city wall. With frightening power, they filled the sky, flying toward Wang Tengfei's finger attack.

BOOM!

An explosion rattled the entire Outer Sect as twenty flying swords collided with the invisible power emanating from Wang Tengfei's index finger. Amidst the explosion, the twenty flying swords twisted about, some of them shattering into pieces. They had successfully blocked the finger attack.

Blood seeped out of Meng Hao's mouth and veins of blood filled his eyes. He consumed another Demonic Core. His killing intent flared, but he still hadn't spoken a single word. That was just his personality; the more he wanted to kill someone, the more furious he became, the quieter he would be.

Wang Tengfei looked as placid as ever, as if he didn't give a care in the world that Meng Hao stood in front of him. Only he could be filled with such arrogance and disregard.

Taking another step forward, he made his second finger attack.

This was the attack that had shattered Meng Hao's jade pendant. Meng Hao didn't bother to spit the blood out of his mouth. He swallowed it. Fingers flickering with incantations, he sent the remaining scattered flying swords shooting toward Wang Tengfei in another attack. Then, surprisingly, he severed his control link to the swords, letting them fly forward with their own inertia.

He slapped his bag of holding, and suddenly more sword auras appeared, another twenty, forming a second wave that whistled forward. This was a Sword Rain that contained nearly forty flying swords in total!

Meng Hao knew that this tactic had its weaknesses. The flying swords wouldn't be dexterous, only fast and sharp. His opponent wouldn't find it difficult to avoid an attack. But Meng Hao was betting that considering his opponent's vast arrogance, he would most likely not try to dodge.

Even if he did try to dodge, Meng Hao would be ready. He had naturally considered this possibility, and was prepared for it.

The scene that was unfolding could only be described as an epic battle. For Cultivation monks practicing Qi Condensation, it was something seldom seen. In the entire State of Zhao in the past several hundred years, there had never been such a battle between two people of the sixth level of Qi Condensation!

Meng Hao had plenty of flying swords. After his experience on the black mountain, he had put a lot of thought into his use of battle magic. With the help of the Wind Blade, he could control large amounts of flying swords. However, it took a lot of spiritual power, and he could only summon twenty each time. Furthermore, his Cultivation Base only permitted him to exercise basic control, enough to shoot them forward. He couldn't move them nimbly in the air, or cause them to change directions. He essentially sacrificed the dexterity of the flying sword and focused on its ability to fly.

As such, he could use even larger groups of them, the same way an ordinary person might just throw objects in succession. Except, he wasn't using his hands, he was using spiritual power to ensure their forward movement. As long as he had enough swords and his spiritual power didn't run out, he could pay the price.

Wang Tengfei didn't use Reliance Sect techniques, because he disdained the Reliance Sect and their techniques. He used techniques of his powerful clan, enabling him to gain an edge on his peers.

Chapter 32: This Finger Brought me Humiliation, Today, I Cripple it!

Meng Hao's flying swords and Wang Tengfei's special magic techniques left the surrounding Cultivators awestruck. No longer did they look down on Meng Hao, but rather were stunned by his vast array of magical items.

It wasn't just them. Shangguan Xiu, Grand Elder Ouyang, and even Sect Leader He Luohua stared in amazement.

Wang Tengfei was strong, able to inspire fear into his cultivation practitioner peers. Everyone knew this, so to see Meng Hao go toe to toe with Wang Tengfei caused everyone watching to feel shocked.

At the moment, forty flying swords descended upon him from multiple directions, a Sword Tempest that seemed as if it could rip apart any living thing that stood in its path. An ordinary Qi condensation sixth-level opponent would have difficulty standing up against it.

Meng Hao coughed up more blood. The only way to force himself to remain upright was to continuously consume Demonic Cores.

A booming sound erupted as Meng Hao's forty flying swords collided with the power of Wang Tengfei's second finger attack. More than half of them were destroyed, but the finger attack could do nothing to Meng Hao other than force him to cough up a bit of blood.

Anyone else would be cautious in their approach to dealing with Meng Hao, but Wang Tengfei was as dismissive as ever. He stepped forward and waved his finger a third time.

Meng Hao's spiritual energy was almost completely exhausted. But he had a lot of Demonic cores available to replenish himself. During this entire time, he had managed to keep his spiritual energy at roughly an even level. As he watched Wang Tengfei make his third movement, he could not help but recall the same finger attack taking away the gourd bottle. The killing intent in his eyes grew stronger. He didn't retreat, and in fact took a step forward, flingers flickering in incantation movements.

Three or four of his bags of holding began to tremble, and then suddenly a succession of sword auras appeared, to the astonishment of all the onlookers.

Waving his sleeve, he sent forth one wave, two waves, three waves of flying swords. They transformed into a dazzling Sword Rain. One sword, ten, twenty, thirty swords... Seventy swords in four waves, an unbelievable sword aura. They shot toward Wang Tengfei.

Meng Hao constantly coughed up blood, then consumed medicinal pills. His eyes were completely bloodshot, but the killing intent in them was as strong as ever. Even if he ran out of spiritual power, he would spare nothing!

Wang Tengfei gave a cold harrumph. With so many people looking on, he didn't want to dodge the attack, but there were just too many flying swords. They appeared to be approaching in a direct line, and yet something about the attack looked off. He had a dark premonition that if he attempted to dodge the attack, he would still be walking into death.

For the first time, something flickered within Wang Tengfei's eyes. Lifting his finger, he immediately moved into the fourth finger attack. A ripple appeared in front of him, and even as it began to spread out, Meng Hao's fingers stopped moving and he clasped his palms together flat in front of him.

"Wind-construct Sword!" As soon as the words came out of Meng Hao's mouth, the seventy flying swords suddenly began to combine together.

The onlookers gaped in shock as the fourth wave of swords picked up speed, slamming into the third wave, which then swept into the Sword Rain of the second wave, and then finally smacked into the back of the first wave. Then a sweeping wind pressed in from multiple directions to form them into the solid shape! From a distance, it appeared as if they had formed a gigantic flying sword.

This was Meng Hao's Flying Sword Matrix, created along with the issuance of his Wind Blade. It was a sword technique he had developed after his time on the black mountain. It shot toward Wang Tengfei with

irresistible force. Popping sounds filled the air as the ripple in front of Wang Tengfei began to warp as if it were being pushed against by a massive force. This in turn caused Wang Tengfei, for the first time ever, to take a step backward.

“How arrogant of you to force me to take a step back.” This was the first time he had spoken to Meng Hao during the entire battle. His left hand slapped his bag of holding and a glittering, crystal statue appeared. It was a statue of a horse, vivid and lifelike, seemingly full of energy and spirit.

A neighing sound filled the air, and the crystal statue seemed to come to life, leaping out of Wang Tengfei’s palm and flying straight toward Meng Hao’s giant sword. As soon as they collided, the giant sword began to collapse, starting from its tip. Layer after layer of swords peeled away, torn apart by the crystal horse. Within an instant, a huge portion of the giant sword had been destroyed, and the only thing left was the hilt. Flying swords scattered about in all directions.

Seeing this, the onlookers’ hearts raced, and they had little time to even process in their minds what was happening. They appeared shocked beyond belief.

And then, just as the giant sword was broken down into a mere hilt, a new sword flew out from the midst of the other swords. A sword made of wood. It shot toward the crystal horse, and when the two hit each other, a sound boomed out louder than any sound which had been heard so far during the battle. It echoed out multiple times.

As of now, the wooden sword was the only sword under Meng Hao’s control. Everything up to this point had been a ruse to keep it concealed, then use it in a surprise move.

The sword, once meant for Wang Tengfei, was now in Meng Hao’s hands. To Wang Tengfei, it was a treasure, but to Meng Hao, it was worth two thousand Spirit Stones. Regardless of how powerful it was, it was the most powerful weapon he had, so of course he would use it.

Amidst the deafening boom, the crystal horse began to shake, and a multitude of cracks appeared on its surface. Then, it simply collapsed into

pieces.

Wang Tengfei's expression changed instantly. Carrying with it the remaining flying swords, the wooden sword shot toward him. As it neared, he reflexively lifted his arm, focused his Cultivation Base on his finger and shot out an explosive force. The force sent all the flying swords spinning, but not the wooden sword. It continued on, stabbing into his finger and shredding it to bloody pieces. Then it spun back to hover next to Meng Hao.

"That finger brought me humiliation," Meng Hao said slowly. "Today, I cripple it!" He spat out a mass of blood, staggering back several paces. Blood dripped from the corners of his mouth.

Wang Tengfei took several heavy steps back, ignoring the pain of his finger, eyes filled with disbelief. He stared at the wooden sword floating next to Meng Hao. The words Meng Hao had just uttered rang in his ears. And then, an unspeakable rage welled up within him.

He recognized this sword!

The moment Wang Tengfei's finger was shredded to pieces, all the Cultivators in the square were shocked. The buzz of conversation again arose.

"Meng Hao destroyed Elder Brother Wang's finger. This... this can't be!"

"Elder Brother Wang is injured. He's Chosen by heaven, but Meng Hao decimated his finger... Meng Hao..."

"It's scary that he has so many flying swords. And he used seventy of them to make a giant sword. How astonishing!"

Shangguan Xiu sucked in a deep breath. Everything that was happening seemed unimaginable. He wasn't the only one surprised. Grand Elder Ouyang had stood up and was looking at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with deep admiration and intense anticipation.

Even He Luohua, standing atop the East Mountain, stared down at Meng Hao, his eyes glittering.

The buzz of conversation reached Wang Tengfei's ears, but he paid it no heed, as if he hadn't heard it at all. Fury burned in his eyes, and he stared murderously at the wooden sword circling Meng Hao.

"So it was you!" Wang Tengfei didn't even bother to stop the blood from gushing out of where finger had once been. He had only been furious once before in his life, and that was the day in the cave when he realized the treasure he had hunted for years had been snatched away. His inner humiliation and madness, and his hatred toward that unknown person, had seeped into his very bones.

This matter was his biggest regret. His shrill screams that day still seemed to echo in his ears. Often, he was shaken from meditation deep in the quiet of night, his heart dripping with blood, feeling like a fool. Every time he thought about it, he fought the urge to go crazy.

Today was the second time in his life that he was furious. He recognised the sword. In his eyes, it belonged to him, his own treasure with which control heaven and earth. And today... here it was in Meng Hao's hands.

"So it was you!" Wang Tengfei's eyes overflowed with murder. His desire to kill Meng Hao could not be any stronger. This look was so different from his usual calm visage that the surrounding Cultivators could not help but murmur to each other about it.

"It was you who stole away my treasure!" Wang Tengfei stared at the wooden sword, murder roiling in his eyes. He felt an impulsive desire to rip Meng Hao to pieces. He suddenly laughed, and as the laughter rolled out across the square, he seemed to grow even more awe-inspiring.

"I have no idea what Elder Brother Wang is talking about," said Meng Hao coldly, wiping the blood off of his mouth. "This sword is yours? Are you sure you haven't made a mistake?" He consumed several Demonic Cores.

"I planned for years to get that sword. It is one-of-a-kind, the only like it in the world. The gold lines on its surface were etched by Heaven itself. Of course I haven't made a mistake." Wang Tengfei looked up to the skies and laughed. It was a grim laugh, a laugh that seemed to make everything

around it grow cold.

Chapter 33: Is This Sword Yours Too?

Wang Tengfei glared at Meng Hao with cold eyes, then took a step forward. He slapped his bag of holding, and two glittering beams of light shot out. Two magical treasures appeared, one a stone tiger, the other a stone aquatic dragon.

They were accompanied by two sounds which reverberated across the square, one, the roaring of a tiger, the other, the howl of a aquatic dragon. The treasures immediately transformed. The first became a white tiger, several meters in length, the other, a magnificent aquatic dragon. They circled around Wang Tengfei, making him look even more imposing.

“You can refuse to admit it, but that sword is mine,” said Wang Tengfei, his voice ghastly. “I never agreed to let you have it and you are not permitted to leave with it.” His fingers moved in an incantation pattern, and the white tiger roared and leaped toward Meng Hao. The aquatic dragon howled as it followed, its body becoming a streaking rainbow.

Meng Hao moved backwards, waving his right hand. The wooden sword flashed forward, followed by a Wind Blade and a Flame Python.

A boom reverberated out and Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood. As he flew back, he saw Wang Tengfei walking out from the explosion, his snow-white robes and long hair floating in the wind, a look of murder on his beautiful features. His eyes shone forth with ridicule.

“Absurd!” said Meng Hao. “You clearly see that the sword is extraordinary, so you want to use the Inner Sect training as an opportunity to rob it from me!”

“It’s useless to keep talking. I will kill you today, and then you will know that you aren’t qualified to take things which belong to Wang Tengfei.” His eyes cold, he waved his hand again; roaring and howling, the white tiger and the aquatic dragon once again charged Meng Hao.

“One-of-a-kind? The only one like it in the world?” Meng Hao laughed, his eyes sneering. He made no attempt to hide the cold ridicule. “Why don’t you take a look and see if the sword really is one of a kind like you

say?” His left hand slapped his bag of holding, and a black beam shot out to circle around Meng Hao. A loud humming sound rang out, like that of a sword. It was his duplicate copy of the wooden sword!

Now that it had appeared, two wooden swords swirled around him. They looked exactly the same in every aspect, their sword auras shining brightly and with immense power.

When he laid eyes on the second wooden sword, Wang Tengfei’s body shook and his eyes went wide, filled with disbelief. His mind dissolved into chaos, and he felt as if he had just been crushed by an entire mountain. He immediately lost control of the white tiger and the aquatic dragon.

“This... this...” His head spun. This unexpected turn of events had caught him completely off guard. He didn’t know what to think, and couldn’t even control his mind.

“Is this sword yours too?” Meng Hao’s eyes flashed, and he stepped forward, suddenly radiating the power of his Cultivation Base. “Is this your one-of-a-kind sword?” He took another step forward.

Wang Tengfei couldn’t answer. Feeling the pressure of Meng Hao’s spirit, he involuntarily took two steps backwards.

“Is this the only sword like it in the whole world?” Meng Hao’s eyes flickered as if with lightning. He continued moving forward, as if all the power he possessed were supporting him.

Wang Tengfei’s face grew pale, and he continued to retreat.

“Wang Tengfei, these two swords are Meng Hao’s! My swords of heaven and earth!” Eyes burning, Meng Hao leaped into the air, incantation patterns flashing in his hands. The two wooden swords glowed brightly, shooting toward the white tiger and the aquatic dragon.

A boom rang out as the white tiger was broken to pieces and the aquatic dragon shattered. Filled with power that seemed capable of destroying anything in the world, the two wooden swords shot toward Wang Tengfei.

Seeing them approach, Wang Tengfei suddenly lifted his head. He slammed his right hand down onto the ground, and a massive incense

stick appeared. As it burned, tendrils of smoke curled up and then shot in Meng Hao's direction. As they moved, they transformed into two figures which slammed into the two wooden swords. A thunderous boom sounded out.

The incense stick was smashed, and the wooden swords retreated back to Meng Hao, who spat out a mouthful of blood. He watched as Wang Tengfei moved forward through the smoke. He didn't walk on the platform, but rather flew through the air, carried forward by tendrils of smoke. He looked at Meng Hao with a strange expression, then eyed the two wooden swords. At the moment, he was still completely at a loss about them, and had begun to doubt himself.

According to his research in the ancient records, the wooden sword really was unique in heaven and earth. There could not be a second one. Regardless of that, the sword was exactly the same one he had seen before, except now there were two...

Meng Hao looked at Wang Tengfei soaring through the air and let out a cold snort. He slapped his bag of holding and two ordinary flying swords appeared. He stepped forward onto them, and they carried him flying into the air. This caused quite a stir amongst the observing Cultivators.

"Only Cultivators who have Established their Foundation can fly. But look, he's flying..."

"Brother Wang has some magical item that lets him fly temporarily, but Meng Hao... he's not sparing any spiritual energy at all. He's using the flying swords to fly."

Killing intent flickered in Wang Tengfei's eyes as he stared at Meng Hao. He put the matter of the wooden swords out of mind. Regardless of whether or not these were the treasures he had sought, he would take them away.

As the killing intent filled the air, Wang Tengfei slapped his bag of holding, and a strip of yellow paper appeared in front of him, a talisman. Its surface was inscribed with various mystical patterns, and it emitted a strong spiritual pressure. It shined with a golden light. This talisman

appeared to be quite different than the one Han Zong had used.

“If you allow me to take the treasure, you can feel some pride when you reach the netherworld,” said Wang Tengfei, glaring at Meng Hao. He felt somewhat distressed. This talisman was the last magical item in his bag of holding. He had spent everything else he possessed in his search for the wooden sword.

He would not have used the talisman were it not necessary. Normally, it could be used three times. But with the level of his Cultivation Base, he could only use it once. Even still, it was powerful, enough to slay a Cultivator of the eighth level of Qi condensation.

Glaring coldly at Meng Hao, Wang Tengfei suddenly lifted his right hand and waved it in front of him. At the same time, he spat out some of his spiritual energy, transferring it to the talisman.

The talisman glowed with immeasurable brightness; as Meng Hao flew through the air, he looked down at it, and suddenly felt a stabbing pain inside him.

It was at this moment that Wang Tengfei’s face changed. He suddenly realized that he didn’t have enough spiritual energy... In fact, he now noticed that the spiritual energy in his body was continuously draining out through his wounded finger.

Because he had been enraged upon seeing the first wooden sword, then shocked and confused by the second, he hadn’t sensed it until now. As of now, there was not enough spirit energy to fully activate the talisman, and not enough time to consume medicinal pills to replenish himself.

“Even though the talisman can’t be fully utilized, it’s still strong enough to kill someone of the sixth level of Qi condensation. Killing you will be as easy as falling off a log!” With no hesitation, he flung the talisman out. It suddenly appeared to be a golden sun which shot toward Meng Hao.

At this life-and-death juncture, a strange light appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes. Even as he flew through mid-air, he suddenly caught a glimpse of the dream he had experienced the day he consumed the Flying Rain-Dragon’s Demonic Core. In the dream, he had looked down into a lake and seen the

reflection of the ancient Flying Rain-Dragon. Now, he could see the same thing again.

“The Sovereign of Heaven...” Meng Hao felt as if he were filled with good fortune. He closed his eyes, and as the golden sun summoned by the talisman approached, the Demonic Core which rested in his Core lake began to shudder. Then, a massive force of spiritual power burst out, filling Meng Hao’s body and causing him to snap his hands out in front of him.

All of the various swords laying around, which he had previously lost control off, suddenly began to shake, then lifted into the air and sped toward Meng Hao. At the same time, the rest of the flying swords in his bag of holding flew out, along with the rest of the various magical items he possessed. They began to merge together, glowing with an intense brightness. All of this was happening, not because of Meng Hao’s spiritual energy, but because of the Demonic Core’s!

For some reason, the Demonic Core had suddenly been stirred into action, and its eruption had utilized some sort of netherworldly power to control the nearly one hundred flying swords and magical items. In the blink of an eye, they had merged together to form... an ancient Flying Rain-Dragon!

Its form was somewhat indistinct, perhaps indistinguishable to the onlookers. Even Wang Tengfei wasn’t aware of it, now that he had lost his Blood connection to the Legacy. Only Meng Hao could sense it.

The two wooden swords were the Flying Rain-Dragon’s fangs. It let out a roar filled with the power of heaven and earth then charged toward the talisman. As soon as they met, a thunderous explosion rang out which shook the entirety of the Reliance Sect. The surrounding Outer Sect disciples retreated backward, nearly deafened. Some of the disciples with low-level Cultivation Bases were nearly knocked senseless.

Both the talisman and the Flying Rain-Dragon contained power far beyond the sixth level of Qi condensation. When they smashed into each other, even someone of the seventh level would be shaken. Only someone

of the eighth level might possibly be able to withstand the power.

As the reverberations from the explosion rang out, the golden sun faded rapidly, and the Flying Rain-Dragon began to fall apart. Layer by layer, one sword, ten swords, one hundred swords... they slowly fell, along with the other magical items which had merged together to form the dragon. They fell and transformed to ash, which drifted away in the wind.

The talisman slowly faded away, and the magical items forming the Flying Rain-Dragon disappeared... but not the two wooden swords. Instead, they shot forward toward pale-faced Wang Tengfei.

Wang Tengfei watched as the swords approached, stabbing toward his chest. Just as they were about to plunge into his heart, a light, sighing voice could be heard descending from the East Mountain.

“Very well, there’s nothing left to do.” Along with the sigh came a gentle force which appeared next to Wang Tengfei, blocking the wooden swords. Wang Tengfei was lifted up and pulled back, off of the platform and down onto the square. He coughed up blood, his eyes blank and confused. He couldn’t believe it... he had lost.

He Luohua had appeared on the platform. Grand Elder Ouyang immediately saluted him with clasped fists. “Greetings, Sect Leader.”

A buzz arose among the surrounding Outer Sect disciples. Each and every one greeted the Sect Leader and saluted respectfully.

Meng Hao looked pale. His spiritual energy was completely dried up. If the Flying Rain-Dragon’s Demonic Core had not exercised its power, he would not have been able to continue. His bags of holding were now completely empty of any magical items. As far as he was concerned, this battle had been a bitter one indeed.

Although he wasn’t quite willing to let Wang Tengfei continue to live, with the Sect Leader here, he had no choice. He would not be able to kill Wang Tengfei this day.

Without a word, he descended onto the platform, his stubborn personality forcing his body to remain upright. He took a few steps

forward, then reached down to pick up the Wang Tengfei's talisman, which had drifted to the ground, and placed it into his robe. Then he lifted his head and looked at He Luohua.

"In this match, Meng Hao is the winner," said He Luohua, looking at Meng Hao with a slight smile. "From this day forth, he is the third member of the Reliance Inner Sect." His words rang out over the silent square. The minds of the onlookers were still reeling, the details of the battle replaying in their heads.

Wang Tengfei looked confused, and when he heard He Luohua's words, he let out a bitter laugh. He looked around at the crowd, who already seemed to have forgotten him, and his heart filled with regret. He laughed again, then coughed up some blood, and collapsed into unconsciousness.

As he collapsed, Meng Hao bit down hard on his own tongue. He saluted He Luohua, then sat down cross-legged and began to meditate.

Grand Elder Ouyang looked at him, his eyes filled with admiration. He slapped his own bag of holding and produced a medicinal pill, which flew forward toward Meng Hao. Meng Hao grabbed it and popped it into his mouth.

He was exhausted to the extreme. Despite his eyes growing dim, he continued on in his Tu Na breathing, slowly attempting to recover.

Chapter 34: Fame from 1,000 Years Ago!

Fatty beamed with joy, happy beyond belief, heart pounding. For Meng Hao to become an Inner Sect disciple was almost like he himself had.

Shangguan Xiu stood in the crowd, face grim. After a bit of time passed, he lowered his head, turned, and left. As he left, his face grew darker, but there was really nothing he could do. Now that Meng Hao was a member of the Inner Sect, even his status as an Elder didn't give him the right to interrogate him. Now, Meng Hao was a true member of the Reliance Sect.

"I reached the seventh level of Qi condensation before I was thirty. I was the number one disciple in the Inner Sect. But now..." Shangguan Xiu sighed. He was loath to give up, but had no choice.

Just then, something happened that no one noticed, neither Shangguan Xiu nor Grand Elder Ouyang. Not even Sect Leader He Luohua. Far away from the Reliance Sect, on the peak of the tree-covered black mountain, standing outside of the empty cave, was a mysterious, powerful figure.

The figure was indistinct, its face unclear. But its body was wreathed in a Qi aura vastly different from the spiritual power of heaven and earth, a Qi that actually seemed to have been rejected by the Heavens. The wind around the figure changed, filling with indistinct cracks that circled around him... and yet an onlooker would not be able to see any of this.

"Reliance Sect... what a vulgar name," the blood-red figure's voice was hoarse as it spoke, filled with a Demonic air. "The name was intentionally changed one thousand years ago to prevent the Heavens from carrying out the punishment of withholding reincarnation. But it is still... The Demon Sealing Sect! And a disciple of the Demon Sealing sect actually dared to consume the Core of the Flying Rain-Dragon, and accept its Legacy... interesting. It seems it was not in vain that I helped you those two times." Even as its voice continued to echo out, bolts of red lightning began to fall. The destructive lightning fell over and over again, but it was over a thousand meters away, as if the Heavens had no power to touch the figure.

The red figure seemed to frown, then looked up coldly into the sky.

“Sooner or later, you be defied, Heavens!” Then it turned toward the Southern Domain and took a step forward.

“My body has been slumbering, and in my boredom, my divine gaze swept over heaven and earth. Seeing what I’ve just seen is interesting. Very interesting.” Laughter rang out, and the figure disappeared, gone in the blink of an eye.

The figure’s arrival and departure, the roiling heavens, the approach of the lightning, onlookers could not see any of it!

Time raced by, and soon seven days had passed.

During the seven days, everyone in the Outer Sect was talking about Meng Hao’s ascension to become an Inner Sect disciple.

Even though everyone had seen the event with their own eyes, it had left them shocked to the core. Despite seven days having passed, they would often lift their heads to gaze at the East Mountain, eyes filled with envy.

There were some people who felt sorry for Wang Tengfei, but they didn’t say anything. It was as if after the battle, Wang Tengfei’s name had become a thing of the past.

Disciples who had been Meng Hao’s enemies were even more disturbed than before, filled with dread. But Meng Hao was no longer present in the Outer Sect, so all they could do was find Fatty to fawn over.

Fatty’s prestige exploded in just a few days. He was the new shop owner at the Low-Level Public Zone, having taken over for Meng Hao. He revelled in the attention of his fellow disciples, filing away at his teeth triumphantly. He was even able to move into one of the nicer residences in the Outer Sect.

Meng Hao was quite busy during the seven days. The Reliance Sect might have been in decline, but there were still rules to follow. Meng Hao bathed and donned new clothes. He kowtowed to the image of Patriarch Reliance and the other Patriarchs of the Sect. Of course, there were many complicated procedures and details involved in all of this.

During this time, he didn’t see Elder Sister Xu at all, as she had secluded

herself in meditation. However, he did see Elder Brother Chen Fan, dressed in his silver robe. From his time in the Outer Sect, Meng Hao's impression of him was that he rarely smiled and was rather old-fashioned. But after getting to know him he found that no matter what question he had, Elder Brother Chen would patiently give a detailed explanation. Meng Hao actually liked him. He thought back to the rumors he'd heard, that Elder Brother Chen Fan cared only about righteousness and the Dao, ignoring matters of the mortal world.

After the seven days had passed, Meng Hao was granted an Inner Sect Immortal's Cave on the East Mountain. Its Spirit Spring bubbled with thick Spiritual Energy, much more so than his previous Immortal's Cave.

Unfortunately, his good mood changed a bit the first time he laid hands on the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills available for Inner Sect disciples. He stood there, staring down at them stupidly.

These Spirit Stones were clearly better than the ones available in the Outer Sect. They were larger, and were not completely transparent, but rather filled with an indistinct, mist-like substance. Meng Hao's face grew pale.

"These are mid-grade Spirit Stones?" murmured Meng Hao. "And Inner Sect disciples get one per year... It's worth one hundred low-grade Spirit Stones from the Outer Sect..." His head spun as he absorbed the information from the ancient piece of jade in front of him, which described the identification methods and differences between the different types of Spirit Stones available to Cultivators engaged in Qi condensation.

"Above mid-grade Spirit Stones are high-grade Spirit Stones.... which don't even exist in the State of Zhao. One of those is worth at least ten-thousand low-grade Spirit Stones... they're basically priceless." Meng Hao's insides twisted, and he took out the few large Spirit Stones he had left in his bag of holding. His face looked more and more unsightly.

"You can tell the value of a Spirit Stone by looking at its size and its internal composition. High-grade Spirit Stones are the largest, and are at least half-covered inside with thick mist formations... The Spiritual Energy

inside won't leak out, and can only be used by a Cultivator who has Established his Foundation." Meng Hao looked mutely at the Spirit Stone he held in his hand. It was larger than a mid-grade Spirit Stone by at least three times, and was almost completely filled with mist formations. It was dazzling, and not a drop of Spiritual Energy emerged from it.

"This... this can't be a high-grade Spirit Stone! I... I squandered two thousand high-grade Spirit Stones!" Meng Hao's heart dropped, and he tried to comfort himself. He thought about the extraordinary wooden sword and how much Wang Tengfei cared about it. And then he thought about the price he had paid the copper mirror to duplicate it. He simply couldn't comprehend the price he had paid in Spirit Stones...

"But how come it seems like this Spirit Stone is even bigger than the descriptions of high-grade Spirit Stones, and has even more mist formations inside?" His heart quavered, and he didn't dare to think about it anymore. His face was pale, and he felt pained to the core.

It took him a while to get control of himself, whereupon he put away the Spirit Stones.

"An insignificant two thousand high-grade Spirit Stones," muttered Meng Hao. "It was nothing, nothing at all." But when he said the word 'insignificant,' it sounded a bit forced.

More days flew by.

"Junior Brother, I watched your battle. You used a lot of magical items. If you had run out, you would have been in a difficult situation. You should go to the Magic Pavilion more often. There are a thousand years of ancient Reliance Sect records there that you could study from."

"Junior Brother, I noticed that you're always hunting small creatures and cooking them for food. That's not correct. Us Cultivators should breathe in the Spiritual Energy of heaven and earth and cast off our mortal bodies. If you're always eating animals, aren't you wasting your Spiritual Energy?"

"Junior Brother, you have too many bags of holding on your person. You shouldn't do it that way. You should have all your items in one bag, that way they are easier to take out."

As the days passed, Meng Hao forced himself not to think about Spirit Stones. It didn't take long before he understood Elder Brother Chen Fan a lot better, and soon he spent most of his time with him, being instructed. He soon realized that this Elder Brother was nothing at all like the rumors in the Outer Sect held him out to be. Although he was very focused on the Dao, he wasn't taciturn at all. In fact, when he started talking, he would keep going for hours and hours, sometimes even an entire day.

Soon it came to the point that if he didn't go looking for Chen Fan, then Chen Fan would come looking for him in his Immortal's Cave, and the discussions would begin.

Meng Hao couldn't refuse. He could only force a smile and listen. Sometimes he would fall asleep in the middle of it, only to wake up to find Brother Chen Fan still talking. He couldn't help but feel sorry for him.

"There aren't enough disciples in the Inner Sect, so Elder Brother Chen doesn't have anyone to talk to. Therefore, he's developed this strange tendency..." Meng Hao now understood why Elder Sister Xu went into secluded meditation so often. Even he himself had thought of going into meditation to get a break from Elder Brother Chen.

Whenever he left his Immortal's Cave, Elder Brother Chen would be there to accompany him.

"I wonder when Elder Sister Xu is going to come out of meditation," thought Meng Hao with a smile. "I can't wait to see the look on her face when she sees me." He now wore a silver robe, and his long hair fluttered behind him as he sat on a mountain crag. He stared at the setting sun, ignoring Elder Brother Chen's constant yammering.

"Junior Brother must be wondering when Junior Sister Xu will be coming out of meditation," said Elder Brother Chen with a smile, looking at Meng Hao.

"Yeah... Uh, what?"

Elder Brother Chen's sudden change of topic left Meng Hao speechless.

"No need to be shy, Junior Brother," bantered Elder Brother Chen with a

smile. “Junior Sister Xu Qing is a natural beauty, it’s perfectly normal for you to have a crush on her.” He had a uncomplicated disposition, and was easy to get along with. Meng Hao liked him. As soon as they had met, he had been willing to take Meng Hao on as a Junior Brother.

“Xu Qing?” Meng Hao coughed. He decided to change the topic. “No, no, I never... oh, right. Elder Brother Chen, a while back you were saying something about what happens after a Cultivator completes his Qi Condensation?”

“After Qi Condensation comes Foundation Establishment, the shedding of the mortal body. This is true spiritual cultivation, and truly being a Cultivator.” Elder Brother Chen smiled at Meng Hao, shaking his head. He was no longer bantering, but speaking warmly.

“When Establishing the Spiritual Foundation, nine Paths will arise from your Core Lake, deep and bottomless. They will spread throughout your body, and this is Foundation Establishment. Of course, there are different types of Foundations, based on the various magical methods used to congeal the Paths. If nine cracks appear, it is a Flawless Foundation. If eighteen cracks appear, it is a Cracked Foundation. More than eighteen cracks means it is a Fractured Foundation. Of these, Flawless is the best, Cracked is good. Fractured is the most common.

“The Reliance Sect used to have a manual describing a method to Establishing a Flawless Foundation, acquired by Patriarch Reliance. Because of this, he was famous in all of the State of Zhao. His name was even known in the Southern Domain. Sadly... when the Patriarch went missing, the technique was not handed down.” Chen Fan explained everything slowly and in great detail. This was just his personality, and Meng Hao had gotten used to it over the days.

“After Foundation Establishment is the great path to Core Formation. The Sect Leader is in this stage. After that, when you develop a Nascent Soul, then you can live forever, and be a true Immortal of this land.”

“What about after the Nascent Soul stage?” asked Meng Hao, listening intently and feeling longing in his heart.

“After the Nascent Soul stage you must Sever your Spirit. That was the stage the Patriarch was at. It is the most difficult stage, where life hangs on a thread. You must Sever your Spirit several times before complete success. That year, Patriarch Reliance left the Sect to meditate in seclusion, and still hasn’t returned.” Chen Fan spoke calmly throughout his explanation, but his attachment to cultivate was clear from his expression.

“Perhaps one day I, Meng Hao, will have a chance to enter the Spirit Severing stage,” he murmured. “What is after that?”

“The stages after Spirit Severing are too high,” said Chen Fan lightly. “I don’t know the details. You have to go to the Southern Domain to learn about those things. In any case, the whole point is to achieve Immortality.”

“Achieve Immortality?”

“Achieve Immortality.”

The mountain breeze gently lifted the hair of the two disciples, carrying their voices off into the distance.

“Junior Brother, if one day you go out into the world to continue your training, you cannot limit yourself to the State of Zhao.” Elder Brother Chen looked at Meng Hao kindly. “Don’t forget, the State of Zhao is a remote State in the Southern Domain of the Nanshan Continent. The Spiritual Energy here is not abundant, and there are few Cultivators.

“The Southern Domain is the true world of Cultivation. Even though the law of the jungle is brutal and ruthless there, it truly represents the peak of the southern regions of the Nanshan continent. Heroes abound, as do Chosen. Compared to there, the State of Zhao is quite calm and peaceful. Cultivators of my generation must climb mountains and tread upon piles of bones to succeed.” A strange light filled his eyes, as if he weren’t speaking to Meng Hao, but rather to himself.

Meng Hao felt quite moved by Elder Brother Chen’s words. Before, he had been somewhat ignorant, but having things so clearly explained left his head buzzing, as if a giant map had suddenly been rolled out in front of him. On the map was the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands, and the heroes of the Southern Domain.

“To follow the path of spirituality, one must abandon the mortal world. You are no longer a mortal. You are a Cultivator, destined to defy the Heavens. If you are not strong, then you are not qualified to exist. If you are not strong, you are not qualified to practice cultivation. If you are not strong, then you are not qualified to stay alive, but only to be trampled over. Are you willing to live this kind of life?” Brother Chen gazed at Meng Hao. As his words entered Meng Hao’s ears and sank into his heart, his eyes began to glitter, and he began to think.

“I am a scholar from Yunjie Village. My parents went missing when I was just a child, and my dream was always to become rich and never again live in poverty, then eventually go see the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands.” The chill night wind blew at his hair as he lost himself in contemplation, the same way he had that year on the top of Mount Daqing.

Chapter 35: I'm Not Willing!

Time slipped by, and at some point, Elder Brother Chen left. Even though Meng Hao had just entered the Inner Sect, he was still a younger Brother, and it was Chen Fan's responsibility to explain matters to him, to help him understand what Cultivation truly is. To help him to know what it means to move forward lest one fall behind, and to comprehend the life-and-death path that was the Cultivation world.

Entering the Inner Sect was his first true step across the threshold into that world. The next step was Establishing his Foundation.

Meng Hao sat alone on the boulder, staring into the sky at the moon and the vast multitude of stars. He was silent, his mind filled with countless thoughts. He felt somewhat confused.

Time continued to pass, and soon it was the middle of the night. Wang Tengfei sat in his Immortal's Cave, looking down at his right hand with its missing index finger. He looked confused. In front of him was a jade slip, broken in half. When he had regained consciousness, that was the first thing he had done.

He hadn't managed to enter the Inner Sect, and thus had not accomplished his second goal. He was on the verge of despair. As soon as he had regained consciousness, he had snapped the jade slip in two with a bitter smile.

He had been defeated, thoroughly defeated, and by none other than an insect. He had been defeated by Meng Hao's sword and weak Cultivation Base. Had He Luohua not intervened, he would be dead.

This defeat ended his path here at the Reliance Sect. He had not emerged from his Immortal's Cave after awakening. He had simply sat there in a daze.

He was Chosen by heaven. His clan's reputation in the Southern Domain was indomitable. He had been insufferably proud since childhood, as if the world lay at his feet. That was why he had refused to stay in his clan, but rather came here to the State of Zhao and the Reliance

Sect, to search for the Legacy and treasure. He had even postponed Establishing his Foundation in order to pursue his two goals. As of now, though, everything had blown away like ash in the wind.

Wang Tengfei's bitter laughter echoed throughout the Immortal's Cave. He laughed and laughed, clenching his fists tightly. Although, his nails were not very sharp, so he couldn't experience the pain Meng Hao had that day.

He just could not accept it. If he had been defeated at the hands of a Chosen, then he could bear the loss. But the person who had robbed his place in the Inner Sect, who had trampled him underfoot, was someone he didn't even deign to look at, an insect whose name he hadn't even been able to recall. He just couldn't accept it.

At this moment, the main door of Wang Tengfei's Immortal's Cave suddenly disintegrated noiselessly. The entire door turned into ash, which floated down to the ground of the Immortal's Cave.

A middle-aged man stood in the doorway, wearing a black robe, hands clasped behind his back. He seemed somewhat emaciated, but carried a haughty air. The moonlight fell onto him, and seemed to quiver and turn into ripples. It was as this man's mere existence could cause the surrounding mountain chains to tremble.

Next to the middle-aged man was a young woman, perhaps eighteen or nineteen years of age. She was incredibly beautiful, tall and slender. She wore no makeup, and yet her face glowed like the dawn. Her hair was pinned up in the shape of a swallow's tail, and her body seemed as if it were carved from jade. She wore a thin, light green garment. Standing there in the moonlight, she emanated a magical aura, cool and composed, refined and free from worldly vulgarity. She looked just like a female celestial, descended from heaven.

"The Wang Clan is one of the three great Cultivation clans in the Southern Domain," said the middle-aged man coolly. His voice contained an awe-inspiring coldness difficult to describe. "It has outmatched many Sects, and has existed for ten thousand years in the Southern Domain.

“You are a Chosen member of the Wang Clan. From birth, you have been destined to do extraordinary things, to rise higher than the highest heavens. You were foreordained to engage in struggles with other Immortals.”

As Wang Tengfei listened to the middle-aged man’s words, he slowly lifted his head, ignoring his severed finger.

“What do some minor setbacks count for? This paltry State of Zhao wouldn’t count for anything in the Southern Domain. It’s filled with ants. If I sent a single Nascent Soul stage clan member here, he could wipe this place clean.” The middle-aged man spoke with complete certainty, leaving no room for argument. Wang Tengfei clenched his fists, and fire appeared in his eyes.

“Your true enemies are the other Chosen members in the clan, the successors of the two major clans in the Southern Domain, and the disciples of the rest of the five clans. Only they are worthy to be your enemy. If they saw your sorry state now, how could you dare to claim the name Wang?!”

“Tell me, what is your family name?” said the middle-aged man with a flick of his sleeve.

“My name is Wang!” Wang Tengfei stood, his eyes gleaming.

The middle-aged man looked at Wang Tengfei for a long moment, then his eyes grew soft.

“You are a Roc of the Wang Clan. In a few years, you will Establish your Foundation. In the future, on the great path to Core Formation, you will have the assistance of the Eastern Purple Qi art from your fiancée’s Sect. You will successfully succeed in Core Formation soon. After that, you will have your Nascent Soul. When that happens, you will find that the pitiable person who defeated you here in the State of Zhao, is still practicing Qi Condensation.

“Then you can truly look down on him like the insect he is.” He gave Wang Tengfei a meaningful look, then turned away.

“Tengfei,” said the beautiful girl. Her light voice was pleasant, and combined with her beauty, made her incredibly enticing. She was perfect, in the same way Wang Tengfei was perfect. Were they to be together, they would truly be a match made in heaven, the envy of anyone traversing the path of Immortality.

Wang Tengfei looked at the girl silently. This was his fiancée, Chu Yuyan, daughter of the Chief Instructor of the Purple Cloud Sect. She was a Chosen member of her Sect, and one of four most famous women in the Nanshan Continent.

“Let’s go back,” she said softly, gazing at Wang Tengfei tenderly.

Wang Tengfei nodded. He followed the girl out of the Immortal’s Cave. Along with the middle-aged man, they walked forward, and suddenly a rumbling sound shook the night sky. A massive lightning bolt shot down from the sky, transforming into a battleship, nearly one hundred meters long. The ship was black, and emanated the feeling of death, especially the massive flagpole from which flapped a red flag, embroidered with the character “Wang.”

On the ship stood numerous men with expressionless faces, standing at attention, radiating cold Qi auras.

The massive noise which had just rung out, as well as the battleship, left the disciples of the Reliance Sect trembling in fear. They looked up at the sight, disbelief written across their face.

Meng Hao still sat on the peak of the East Mountain. Pulled out of his contemplation, he looked up at the shocking black battleship and red flag, and his heart quivered.

“I should never have agreed to let you come to this backwater place,” said the middle aged man as they stepped foot onto the ship. “Even if the Sublime Spirit Scripture was rumored to have been seen here, that was something that occurred hundreds of years ago.” Wang Tengfei stood there, looking out at the Reliance Sect. He slowly wiped away all the memories of the recent years.

No longer was his gaze warm and gentle, no longer was his smile kind

and sincere. He had become cold, especially his eyes, which radiated hatred. He now seemed completely different from the old Elder Brother Wang.

He looked down at Meng Hao sitting there on the mountaintop. The two of them stared at each other for a moment, and then Wang Tengfei's eyes once again filled with disregard. As far as he was concerned, Meng Hao was a bug. Pride filled him, because his family name was Wang!

At this moment, the middle-aged man caught sight of Meng Hao sitting there. He didn't reveal his Cultivation Base, but his gaze itself was enough to cause a thunderous roar which shook the entire East Mountain. Like a sharp sword, his gaze shot toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's expression changed, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. His entire body felt ice-cold, and he sensed an intense, deadly force fall upon him. His head spun, and he lost the power to even think. He was so weak that he felt as if he could collapse from a single blow.

He felt death upon him. His body would shrivel up, his soul would wink out. Blood dripped down from between his eyebrows.

Aloneness. Helplessness. Death. They melded together into a giant hand which pushed down on him, slowly crushing him to pieces, smashing him into a place beyond recovery.

Suddenly, a cold snort rang out, filling the entire Reliance Sect, and a figure in blue appeared in front of Meng Hao.

"Your Cultivation Base is in the Core Formation stage. Not a Mottled Core, either, but at least Purple or Red. And yet you bully a Qi Condensation pup like this? Are you really Wang Xifan of the Wang Clan of the Southern Domain, Third Generation Dao Protector?" It was Sect Leader He Luohua. Suddenly, a deafening, earth-shaking roar erupted.

The sound thundered out, seeming as if everything in sight would crumble from it. Then it turned into layer upon layer of ripples, emanating from He Luohua. He stood there as if he were the only person in the world, staring coldly toward the Wang Xifan as he stood there in the battleship.

“I’ve incurred Fellow Believer He’s ridicule,” said Wang Xifan with a gentle laugh. “I’m here to take Tengfei away. Thank you for caring for him these years.” His eyes were filled with an indescribable arrogance. He flicked his sleeve. The battleship began to hum, then it transformed into a streak of colors and shot off into the starry sky, leaving behind only the twinkling starlight.

Meng Hao coughed up some more blood, but continued to stare off into the distance, his cold eyes glittering.

He Luohua looked back silently at Meng Hao, then sighed and left. Meng Hao gazed off into the distance toward the disappearing battleship.

“So that was a Core Formation Cultivator. He could crush me with a single look. And that’s just having formed a Core. After that is the Nascent Soul stage and then the Spirit Severing stage, and even more... The Southern Domain, the Wang Clan!” Meng Hao ground his teeth angrily, fire burning in his eyes.

“If you’re not strong, you don’t qualify to exist. If you’re not strong, you don’t qualify to practice cultivation. If you’re not strong, you don’t have the right to keep living, but can only be taken advantage of... Are you willing to live a life like this?” Elder Brother Chen’s words echoed in his head, more and more strongly, burning indelibly into his mind, into his bones, into his soul.

“I’m not willing!” said Meng Hao slowly, clenching his fists. His voice was weak, but in his heart, the voice resounded like a thunderclap.

“I’m not willing to let anyone take advantage of me!

“I’m not willing to be weak!

“I’m not willing to be deprived of the right to fight back!

“I will be strong! I will become powerful!!” Meng Hao had always wanted to become rich and travel to the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands. He still had that desire, but in addition to that, he had a new belief. He would become powerful. On the path of cultivation, the path of resisting the

Heavens, if you are not powerful, you are dead.

Chapter 36: The Perks of the Inner Sect

Half a month passed, during which Meng Hao spent most of his time sitting cross-legged in the Sect's Magic Pavilion, studying the ancient records. Now he had a much deeper understanding of the State of Zhao and the Southern Domain.

He had even discovered a hand-drawn map of the sprawling Nanshan continent, which showed the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands, the Northern Desert of the Qiang people, the Barbarian Western Lands, and of course the Southern Domain, where he was currently located.

The whole world was neatly displayed on the map, and its image was now burned into Meng Hao's brain. The Southern Domain comprised a vast section of the Nanshan continent, whereas the State of Zhao was just a tiny dot on its perimeter.

"The Southern Domain is so big that it could hold thousands of the State of Zhao..." He looked out at the blue sky outside the Magic Pavilion, his eyes filled with a fascinated look.

"So it turns out that traveling to the Great Tang in the Eastern lands isn't that simple. You have to cross the Milky Way Sea..." After a while, Meng Hao looked back down at the map, looking at all the four major regions of the Nanshan continent. The Eastern Lands and the Northern Desert formed a subcontinent, separated from which by a large ocean were the Western Barbarian Lands and the Southern Domain, which formed another subcontinent.

When the sun began to fall behind the western mountains, and dusk approached, Meng Hao rubbed his eyes, returned the map to its place, and left the Magic Pavilion. He looked off into the distance toward the east for a while, then turned and headed back to his Inner Sect Immortal's Cave.

Inside the Immortal's cave, the luminescent pearls inlaid into the ceiling emitted a soft light onto the light green walls. There were five stone rooms, and a gurgling Spirit Spring, filling the cave with dense Spiritual Energy. This was a perk available only to disciples of the Inner Sect. Meng

Hao entered and sat cross-legged onto a slab of white jade. It was not made of Spirit Stone, but meditating upon it helped one's mind to be clear, and was a relatively rare treasure.

This also was something only for Inner Sect disciples.

"Only Inner Sect disciples can truly be considered members of the Reliance Sect," thought Meng Hao, quietly looking around. The light green stone walls were carved with various birds and beasts, each of which seemed to be filled with deep meaning. Even looking at them left one feeling refined.

"These are very different perks from those in the Outer Sect. This is in order to emphasize the outstanding qualities of Inner Sect disciples. Just like in the mortal world, there is a division of layers. By struggling, one can surpass the Outer Sect. After that, if one wishes to become exalted, one must become stronger!

Soon, dusk fell, and then Meng Hao heard a respectful voice from outside.

"Elder Brother Meng, Li Fugui from the foot of the mountain requests an audience." It was the voice of a boy, a servant. After Meng Hao had joined the Inner Set, this boy had been assigned to help him care for his daily affairs.

This was yet another perk of life in the Inner Sect. At first, Meng Hao had a hard time getting used to it. He had never had someone waiting upon him before. But when he saw Elder Brother Chen's servant helping him, it was easier to accept. However, he still held firm to his desire to grow stronger.

Only the strong can have power over others, and prevent others from controlling them. The law of the Cultivation world and rules of the Reliance Sect were the same. It was not reasonable or fair, but it existed, and that was the way of life.

Existence was truth. The world is fundamentally unreasonable, and naturally, there is no true fairness.

“Send him in,” said Meng Hao coolly. Filled with reverence, the young servant complied. After being assigned to wait upon Meng Hao, his very life belonged to him.

Shortly thereafter, Fatty entered, clicking his teeth and striding with long steps. This was not his first time to visit, but rather his third. Every time he came, he was filled with excitement. This was not a place Outer Sect disciples could visit without the consent of the person they called upon.

The young servant led Fatty in respectfully. Fatty looked around, rubbing his hands along various items in wonder, even the white jade slab that Meng Hao sat on.

“It’s not your first time here,” said Meng Hao with a laugh, watching him.

“Meng Hao, this place is just too amazing. Every time I come, I just can’t control myself. The Immortal’s Cave of an Inner Sect disciple. It’s a place of legend! You know, after the last time I came here, a bunch of Outer Sect disciples crowded around me asking all sorts of questions. I’m important now!” His body trembled, and it took a moment for him to stop thinking about it. He sat down in front of Meng Hao.

“If you’d like, I can request for Wang Tengfei’s Immortal’s cave to be given to you.”

“That... that would be incredible,” said Fatty, looking excited, but at the same time a bit shy.

“Zhao Hai,” said Meng Hao coolly. He waved his right hand, and the main door opened. The young servant rushed in and gave Meng Hao a deep salute.

He looked to be about fourteen or fifteen, close to Fatty’s age. He had delicate features, and had only arrived on the mountain recently. It was said he was from the same village as Little Tiger, and that his family was rich.

“Take my spirit tablet to the Cave Dispensing Pavilion and retrieve the jade slip to Wang Tengfei’s Immortal’s Cave.” He waved his hand, and a

white jade slip flew out into the young servant's hand.

The young servant accepted the assignment, then left with a respectful expression on his face.

"Meng Hao, when are you going to come down off the mountain?" asked Fatty eagerly. "I promised the Outer Sect disciples you would go to inspect them. You can't go back on your word, I promised them."

"Grand Master Ouyang said that I would preside over the next Pill Distribution Day," he said with a smile. "I believe that would be the day after tomorrow." The two of them had entered the Sect together, three years ago. A deep friendship had long since grown between the two of them.

"Great, the day after tomorrow it is. Oh, right, our business has been doing well in the past half month. I already separated out your 80%." He handed a bag of holding to Meng Hao, looking pleased with himself. It seemed he too understood the meaning of the Reliance Sect. With Meng Hao to rely on, who in the Outer Sect would dare to even say one wrong word to him?

Even better, the beautiful female disciples of the Outer Sect had begun to fawn over him until he fairly floated in the air. For the moment, Fatty was quite popular.

"Has Shangguan Xiu caused you any problems recently?" asked Meng Hao suddenly, his eyes flashing.

"Nobody has seen that bastard recently," replied Fatty, his voice becoming grave. "I've assigned a disciple to do some spying for me, and he said that Shangguan Xiu sits in secluded meditation all day. He never comes out."

"Just be careful," he warned, and not for the first time. "If anything happens, snap the message token I gave you."

Soon, the young servant Zhao Hai returned with the jade slip to Wang Tengfei's Immortal's Cave. Meng Hao gave it to Fatty. The two of them laughed and chatted deep into the night. It seemed Fatty didn't want to

leave. In fact, he seemed to be growing more excited.

Meng Hao was surprised at this, but when he remembered what day it was, and laughed.

“Today is the day Medicinal Fruits are distributed in the Inner Sect,” said Meng Hao.

Fatty licked his lips and nodded, his heart filled with envy at the differences between the Inner and Outer Sect disciples. Every month Medicinal Fruits were distributed, a special type of Spiritual Fruit infused with Medicinal Pills. The fruit itself tasted like a Medicinal Pill, but was much more effective than ordinary Medicinal Pills.

Inner Sect disciples received the fruits once per month.

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the young servant Zhao Hai entered. He actually despised Fatty, but didn't show even the slightest hint of it on his face. In his hands he carried the Medicinal Fruits, wrapped up in a large green leaf.

A delicate aroma wafted out from it, causing Zhao Hai to swallow deeply. He put the fruits down and then left.

When the large leaf was removed, the medicinal fragrance filled the air. Inside the leaf were two small, semi-transparent, light-red fruits. They seemed so delicate that they might break if you touched them. Inside each one could just barely be seen a medicinal pill.

Fatty's eyes went wide. He had never eaten Medicinal Fruit before, but had heard it mentioned recently by some Outer Sect disciples. After making some enquires, he had discovered the distribution date, and so had hurried eagerly to visit Meng Hao. He picked up one of the fruits and put it into his mouth. He bit down, then swallowed, and a delicious flavor filled his mouth. Then, a hot sensation filled his head and spread out through his whole body.

“Amazing, amazing. I must be the first Outer Sect disciple to ever eat a Medicinal Fruit. When word gets out, the girls will be envious to death. Everyone will be envious of Master Fatty's luck.” It suddenly seemed as if

he had remembered something, and he snapped his mouth shut, not letting any of the fragrant aroma escape. Using his hands, he signalled to Meng Hao that he needed to leave, then ran off.

“I have proof!” he thought. “I have to find some of those female disciples and let them smell it.” The more he thought about it, the more excited he got, and he raced down the mountain even faster.

Fatty’s clever plan was obvious, causing Meng Hao to laugh. He slowly placed the remaining Medicinal Fruit into his mouth. It tasted delicious, filled with dense Medicinal flavor.

“This is something else that Inner Sect disciples...” As he ate the Medicinal Fruit, he sighed. This life was not something that Outer Sect disciples could enjoy. If he wanted to, he could simply make a gesture, and any of the beautiful female disciples would instantly become devoted to him.

Soon, two days had passed, and Pill Distribution Day arrived. Meng Hao walked out of his Immortal’s Cave, followed closely by the young servant Zhao Hai. In his hand he carried a purple bag of holding, which was filled with Spirit Stones and Medicinal Pills to be distributed.

A mountain breeze welcomed the dawn as Meng Hao descended the mountain. Along the way, the Outer Sect disciples he ran into would look at him in surprise, then stop and give him a deep salute with clasped hands.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng.”

“Elder Brother Meng is as elegant as ever. I haven’t seen you in many days, Junior Sister has missed you.”

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng. Your latent talent is spectacular, your Cultivation Base astonishing. You will definitely be a pillar of the Sect.”

Amidst all the flattery Meng Hao walked along until he reached the square, which was already filled with a good number of disciples. Catching sight of him, they saluted, and then the air filled with their flattering words.

He nodded, smiling, then leaped up, carrying Zhao Hai with him onto the platform. This was not his first time here, but it was his first time to distribute Medicinal Pills.

His gaze swept across the crowd. Every single person's face was filled with reverent devotion. Gradually, Meng Hao's face grew distracted, and he thought back to his first Pill Distribution Day, and then to the time Wang Tengfei had humiliated him. Many memories flitted through his mind.

Finally, he heaved a deep sigh, and said, "Sound the bells."

Chapter 37: Water and Ink in the Evening

The bells rang out, reverberating both in Meng Hao's heart and throughout the Reliance Sect. Soon, Meng Hao could see countless disciples hurrying forward.

Before long, the square was packed. As the disciples entered, they looked at Meng Hao in shock, then saluted.

Fatty stood in the crowd, looking pleased, filing away at his teeth with his flying sword. He was surrounded by a group of fawning disciples.

"So Elder Brother Meng is distributing the Medicinal Pill today... ai, I remember back when he was an Outer Sect disciple like us, but now he's a member of the Inner Sect."

"Elder Brother Meng is scholarly and refined. I heard that he used to be a scholar of high rank, but he cared more about Cultivation, so he quit and joined the Reliance Sect."

"Now that you mention it, I remember the first time I saw Elder Brother Meng those years ago. I could tell that he wasn't ordinary. During his whole fight with Wang Tengfei, I knew that Elder Brother Meng would achieve victory." The buzz of conversation filled the air, eventually reaching Meng Hao's ears. He let out a dry cough.

Even though it was a relatively quiet cough, it caused all the disciples in the square to suddenly go silent. They looked up at him respectfully. The morning sun shone down onto his silver robe, and he truly looked like a celestial being.

Meng Hao caught sight of Zhou Kai in the crowd; his face looked conflicted. Then Meng Hao caught sight of somber Yin Tianlong, who gave him a forced smile. He also saw the other Qi Condensation fourth level disciples whom he recognized from that day. When his gaze fell upon them, their faces filled with ingratiating looks.

He even saw Cao Yang, standing there trembling.

"Today, I shall preside over Pill Distribution," said Meng Hao. He was a

scholar, so he had no need to prepare words; he just spoke naturally. When he spoke, his words carried force, piercing into the hearts of the onlookers. "Fellow disciples, please devote yourself to Cultivation, and eventually you will pass the sixth level. I look forward to that day, when the Reliance Inner Sect has one more member."

The force of his words came not from his Cultivation Base, but rather his status as an Inner Sect disciple.

"We will remember Elder Brother Meng's admonitions." Several people below spoke out, faces filled with emotion, as if they had just heard the voice of Heaven. One after another, they saluted Meng Hao.

Soon everyone was repeating the words, until the whole square spoke together in harmony.

Meng Hao took the bag of holding from the young servant at his side, opened it, and waved his sleeve. Medicinal pills and Spirit Stones shot out to everyone.

After that, his right hand flashed over the bag of holding, then held up a milky white Medicinal pill. It emanated white Qi and a fragrant aroma. It seemed as if it contained the glow of dawn.

"It's... it's a White Spirit Pill!"

"That pill is extraordinarily effective for anyone of the fourth level of Qi Condensation or lower. They haven't distributed one for a long time. Finally one appears!" Soon, everyone in the square below was breathing heavily, staring at the Medicinal pill in Meng Hao's hand.

His eyes scanned the crowd. Fatty was smiling. This pill wasn't anything rare as far as he was concerned. He already had a few in his bag of holding, which Meng Hao had given him.

"This pill is extraordinary. All of you must surely know that I planned to give this only to a suitable disciple. And yet, I, Meng Hao, keep old friendships in mind. I just caught sight of an old friend, so I shall bestow the pill to him." His gaze fell onto Cao Yang, who suddenly began to tremble. Meng Hao flicked his right hand, and the pill shot forth.

"I'm finished!" thought Cao Yang, looking like he was about to cry. "I'll be recuperating from the injuries for months..." He wailed inside, and now he knew that Meng Hao could hold a grudge. Even though he had become an Inner Sect disciple, he had not forgotten about all the things that had happened before.

As the lights in the square faded, Meng Hao flicked his sleeve and left, not staying behind to watch the fighting break out.

Fatty ran over to follow him, his face flushed. He glared at the young servant Zhao Hai, motioning for him to step back a distance. It seemed he was worried the boy might replace him. He walked next to Meng Hao.

"Elder Brother Meng," he said with anticipation, "why don't we take a stroll around the Outer Sect?"

Thinking back to how he had done the same thing with Elder Sister Xu so many years ago, Meng Hao nodded his head with a smile.

The two of them walked forward, with Zhao Hai following in the rear, looking irritated. Not long after leaving the square, they saw Zhou Kai hurrying to catch up with them.

"Greetings, Elder Brother Meng," he said, his expression somewhat perturbed. He had offended Meng Hao more than once, and had assumed that upon joining the Inner Sect, he would show more restraint. But upon seeing Cao Yang's fate, he was nervous, and so rushed over.

Meng Hao looked him over, but didn't say anything. Fatty took a step forward and said loudly: "What do you want?"

"A few days ago, I, Zhou, came across a treasured item. As soon as I saw it, I could tell that it was destined for Elder Brother Meng. Please, accept my gift." Biting his tongue, he pulled out a bag of holding from within his robe and presented it to Meng Hao. Fatty gave a cold harrumph and grabbed it, then handed it to Meng Hao with a wide smile.

Meng Hao accepted it and glanced over its contents. Then he nodded to Zhou Kai, turned, and walked off, his expression as cool as the clouds in the sky. Zhou Kai watched on helplessly, sighing in his heart.

“I’m not worthy to be an Inner Sect Disciple, perhaps these items will leave you dissatisfied...”

As Meng Hao walked away, Yin Tianlong, off in the distance, let out a sigh. With a smile on his face, he hurried forward. He too said that he had found some items which were destined to be Meng Hao’s. He also offered up a bag of holding, inside of which were fifty Spirit Stones. Meng Hao accepted it with a slight frown.

“We’re both fellow disciples,” he said. “The grievances of the past are not worth keeping track of. There’s no need to act like this.”

Upon hearing this, Yin Tianlong’s heart thumped, and he understood Meng Hao’s true meaning. Inwardly cursing Zhou Kai for giving more, he clenched his jaw and produced another bag of holding, whereupon Meng Hao nodded.

As he walked, Meng Hao met more people who had offended him in the past, and they all acted similarly. Soon he had ten new bags of holding.

“What do you think?” said Fatty, looking pleased. “I handled things pretty well, didn’t I? I found all of them earlier and gave them a bit of coaching. I told them that one must offer up a bit of blood now to avoid trouble in the future.”

Meng Hao laughed and shook his head. He had sensed something odd about the goings-on and had guessed that Fatty must have been up to something over the past half month.

“What about that fifth-level disciple who tried to kill you that day?” asked Meng Hao.

“Oh, him. I used the jade slip you gave me to make him go see the Minister of the Outer Sect, who arranged for him to go out into the wild mountains to catch some Demonic beasts. He can’t return until he gets 100.” As far as Fatty was concerned, anyone who offended him would have to pay the price.

“Just don’t do something publicly that could box you into a corner,” said Meng Hao, his eyes flashing and his voice low.

“I understand,” said Fatty in a similarly low voice. “It’s taken care of. Zhou Kai and Yin Tianlong will get rid of him for good.”

They looked at each other, then laughed. They never brought up the matter again.

After making a circle around the Outer Sect, and having been greeted by many disciples, they finally reached the Pill Cultivation Workshop. Meng Hao paused for a moment to look at it, then a smile broke out on his face and he entered.

When the middle-aged man who ran the workshop saw Meng Hao, he stood up.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng.”

Meng Hao smiled and nodded his head, glancing around at all the Medicinal pills.

“Don’t worry, Elder Brother Meng,” said the middle-aged man. “Junior Brother Li Fugui is taking care of the Pill Workshop. Business is good. I definitely won’t give any other disciples a chance to buy Medicinal Pills.” He thumped his palm onto his chest.

Fatty beamed with joy. Previously, he had given the middle-aged Cultivator a bag of holding when no one was looking. Soon, the man had grown accustomed to this. Although the Medicinal pills here belonged to the Sect, and weren’t personal property, the man wasn’t opposed to making a bit of profit of his own.

Thanks to Fatty’s anticipation and stubbornness, it wasn’t until midday that Meng Hao was able to satisfy him. They walked around the entire Outer Sect until everyone had seen them together. Finally, after much begging and pleading, they went to the Treasure Pavilion.

The shrewd-looking man at the Treasure Pavilion had been waiting outside for some time. When he saw Meng Hao approaching, he made a long, grand salute, then in a loud, clear voice said, “Treasure Pavilion disciple Sun Tiandi gives greetings to Elder Brother Meng. Elder Brother Meng is a dragon among men, powerful and imposing beyond the

ordinary...” The man was not very educated, and his words were a bit over the top. His expression was one of excitement, but inside he was a bit worried, although only he knew that.

He feared that Meng Hao would bring up the matter of him cheating him all those years back. He glanced at the eager-looking Fatty.

Fatty cleared his throat. “My friend here wants me to go in to take a treasure,” he said, sounding a bit embarrassed. “If it breaks any rules, you can place the blame on him.”

Meng Hao was a loss for word. Finally, he went in with Fatty to inspect the Treasure Pavilion. After a while, they left, despite Fatty’s pleas to stay. By the time Meng Hao arrived back at the East Mountain, the sun was beginning to set. He sat down on a boulder outside the Immortal’s Cave, thinking about the day’s events. Now he had an even deeper understanding of what it meant to be a member of the Inner Sect.

As evening fell, Meng Hao looked out at the rosy sky. Then he noticed that off in the distance, a woman approached. She looked like some sort of celestial creature, wearing a silver robe, with long black hair and a pale face that was beautiful even though she wore no makeup whatsoever. Her face, though cold, seemed to Meng Hao to contain something delicate and touching.

“Elder Sister Xu,” said Meng Hao, cupping his hands in greeting.

“Congratulations, you’ve become a member of the Inner Sect.” Just like her name, Elder Sister Xu was cold and cheerless. That was her personality, and yet, she didn’t treat everyone coldly. For example, upon hearing her young servant mention Meng Hao, she had come here to see him.

Meng Hao smiled, standing next to her. Their long robes rippled in the mountain breeze.

“Today I went to the Pill Cultivation Workshop and traded for another Cosmetic Cultivation Pill.” He lifted it up and handed it to her.

She said nothing, looking at the pill for a while, then eventually

accepting it. She stood there with him, silently looking off into the rosy horizon.

She was incredibly beautiful, seemingly flawless, like jade. The glow of the setting sun reflected off her, increasing her beauty.

Time seemed to come to a standstill. As they stood there on the East Mountain, their shadows merged together in the evening sun, like ink blending with water. It was something which would last for an eternity.

The evening sunlight slowly faded past the horizon, and then the moon peeked out. Finally, Elder Sister Xu turned and began to walk off. She had only taken five steps before she stopped.

“I went to the Pill Cultivation Workshop. The Cosmetic Cultivation Pill you gave me before wasn’t purchased by you.” With that, she left, not looking back.

Meng Hao stared in shock, and wasn’t even able to react until some time had passed. He scratched his head. His eyes gradually filled with light. He had never imagined that something like this would happen. And yet, it seemed it had...

Chapter 38: Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture

Two months passed in the twinkling of an eye. Meng Hao had already been a member of the Inner Sect for an entire season. He did not continue to visit the Outer Sect often. Like a fish in water, Fatty had grown accustomed to surviving on his own, and was quite at ease.

Most of Meng Hao's time was spent in the Magic Pavilion.

One day, he sat there cross-legged, a calm expression on his face as he read a bamboo text. He raised his right hand and began to make incantation gestures, causing a magical light to circulate around it and cast flickering shadows onto his face.

A Water Globe appeared, but then unexpectedly transformed into mist and dissipated into the surroundings. Meng Hao frowned, putting down the bamboo text. He reached into his robe and pulled out a glowing jade slip.

It was pure white and blurry inside, as if it were filled with mist. A closer inspection revealed that the surface was actually translucent, like crystal.

"Chen Fan, Xu Qing, Meng Hao. Come to the main temple hall on the East Mountain." The words were spoken by a dignified voice which transmitted out from within the jade slip. It was easily identifiable as belonging to Sect Leader He Luohua.

Meng Hao straightened up the bamboo texts, stood and strode silently out of the main door of the Magic Pavilion, making his way toward the top of the East Mountain.

At almost the same time as he walked out, two figures shot toward the peak. One had a warm, gentle face, filled with righteousness: Chen Fan. The other was beautiful but cold: Elder Sister Xu Qing.

Xu Qing cast a glance at Meng Hao. This was the first time they had seen each other since that evening the previous month.

The three sped toward the peak of the East Mountain, eventually arriving at the main temple hall. It had an ancient feel, the rich ornamentation giving the feeling that it had seen many ages pass. This was a very important place to the Reliance Sect, a place that throughout the generations, only Inner Sect disciples could visit.

Within the main temple hall were nine statues. The foremost one was of an old man, his expression not one of anger, yet still filled with might. His dark eyes seemed to shine with life. His left hand was lifted up in front of him, his chin raised as if he were staring down his nose at all creation. He seemed to emanate a sort of indescribable, domineering air. Behind him, eight statues were arranged neatly, all of them possessing the demeanor of transcendent beings.

Meng Hao had visited this place during his first seven days in the Inner Sect. He had kowtowed before these statues, and knew well that the calm, powerful old man was none other than Patriarch Reliance. The other statues were the other Patriarchs of the Reliance Sect.

Sect Leader He Luohua stood beneath the statues, his back toward Meng Hao and the others as they entered. He stared at the statues as if he were in a trance. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. Next to him was Grand Elder Ouyang. He nodded to the three of them, a solemn expression on his face.

“Pay homage to the Patriarch,” he said, his voice profound.

Meng Hao, Xu Qing and Chen Fan bowed deeply to Patriarch Reliance, their faces somber.

“I joined the Sect when Patriarch Reliance had been missing for one hundred years,” said He Luohua. “At that time, the Reliance Sect was still in its glory days.” He sighed and turned around. Meng Hao, Chen Fan and even Xu Qing gazed at him with shining eyes.

He was silent a moment, before slowly continuing: “You have read about Patriarch Reliance in the ancient records, and know how glorious our Reliance Sect used to be... We even had a complete understanding of the three levels of Foundation Establishment. I’ve called you here today to

explain the complete truth.

“The former glory of the Reliance Sect was all due to Patriarch Reliance. Because of his Cultivation Base, he dominated the entire State of Zhao. His reputation even shook the Southern Domain. All of that was because of one of the manuals of the Sublime Spirit Scripture.” As He Luohua spoke, Chen Fan’s eyes began to shine brightly. Even Xu Qing’s grew sharp.

Only Meng Hao stared blankly; he had no idea what the Sublime Spirit Scripture was.

“The Qi Condensation manual?” said Chen Fan lightly. He was a senior disciple of the Inner Sect, and knew many secrets. Other things he had worked out through speculation.

“The Sublime Spirit Scripture is one of the three great classic scriptures in the Nanshan Continent,” continued He Luohua softly. “It was passed down through the generations since ancient times. Originally it was comprised of seven manuals, but most have been lost. One of them was the Qi Condensation manual, which describes how to establish a Flawless Foundation. The Foundation Establishment manual describes the method to Form a Purple Core, not a Crimson or Mottled Core. The Core Formation manual can enable one to develop a four-colored Nascent Form... In other words, each manual enables one to reach the strongest stage.

“That year, Patriarch Reliance obtained the Qi Condensation manual. The reason the heir to the Wang clan joined the Reliance Sect was because of the Sublime Spirit Scripture’s Qi Condensation Manual.”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, and his heart began to race. He had heard Elder Brother Chen speak of the different levels of Foundation Establishment. Now that he knew how powerful this magic was that Patriarch Reliance had obtained, he understood why Wang Tengfei had joined the Reliance Sect.

“If I could obtain it...” The strong desire in his heart suddenly began to burn even hotter.

“Sadly, even I have never laid eyes on this Qi Condensation manual, let alone others,” said He Luohua. “The scripture was not handed down. It exists only in the memory of the Patriarch.” Meng Hao remained silent, and Chen Fan’s face flashed with realization. Xu Qing raised her head to look at the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

Silence reigned in the main temple hall.

“Four hundred years have passed, and everyone in the outside world assumes that the Patriarch died during his meditation. Only myself and a few others know that the Patriarch... is absolutely not dead.” As his words drifted out into Meng Hao’s ears, they seemed to transform into a thunderous roar.

“Four hundred years ago, the Patriarch’s Cultivation Base had reached the late Nascent Soul stage. And yet, he was reaching the end of his life. In order to break through to the fabled Spirit Severing stage, one must be at least one thousand years old. If not, how can he defy the Heavens to sever his Spirit?

“The Patriarch chose to meditate in seclusion, in order to sever his Spirit body and be reborn. It was a meditation of... four hundred years.

“When he went into meditation four hundred years ago, the Patriarch left a command. Every one hundred years, he would send out some pieces of Vorpall Jade, formed from his own blood. Then, the outstanding members of the current generation of Inner Sect disciples could use the Vorpall Jade to enter his meditation zone. By kindling the Qi and blood inside the Vorpall Jade, they could have a chance, if lucky, to gain enlightenment of the knowledge he permeated throughout the area. Knowledge of... the Sublime Spirit Scripture.” He Luohua’s words echoed out. Meng Hao lifted his head up, as did the others.

“Success is success. Failure is failure. If things had stayed the same, surely a disciple would have succeeded already. But two hundred years ago, the Patriarch experienced an accident in his cultivation. He almost lost his life. Afterwards, the chances of enlightenment in his meditation zone grew weak, and the restrictive spells stronger. He didn’t send any

more Vorpal Jades out until five years ago... When he did, he sent out three pieces.

“Three pieces of Vorpal Jade indicate that three individuals may enter. It also reveals how powerful the restrictive spells are in the Patriarch’s meditation zone, and means that there are only three areas where enlightenment may occur.” He Luohua’s voice reverberated throughout the main hall. He flicked his right sleeve, and three blood-red streaks shot toward Meng Hao and the others, to stop floating in front of them.

They were jade-smooth Blood Crystals, also known as Vorpal Jade.

“You three are the only disciples of the Inner Sect, and therefore I bestow these Vorpal Jades to you. Whether or not you gain the enlightenment of the Sublime Spirit Scripture will depend on your luck.” With that, he flicked his sleeve again, and the statue of Patriarch Reliance began to hum. Its eyes shone with boundless radiance, and a vortex began to form in front of him.

“Enter,” said He Luohua, his voice sounding out like thunder. “I wish you luck in enlightenment.” Meng Hao and the others seemed to transform into auroras as they gripped their pieces of Vorpal Jade and shot into the vortex, disappearing inside. Outside, the vortex remained, but without a Vorpal Jade, no one, not even a Cultivator at the Nascent Soul stage, could enter it.

Looking up at the vortex, Grand Elder Ouyang quietly said, “Who knows which of them will acquire the Sublime Spirit Scripture, or... perhaps they will all come up empty-handed.”

“It depends on personal luck, there’s no use in thinking too much about it.” He Luohua sat down cross-legged next to him and began to meditate.

When Meng Hao entered the vortex, a blinding light appeared in front of his eyes which forced him to close them. A rumbling roar sounded in his ears, and then he heard strange shrieks and screams coming from all directions. After what seemed like years, he felt his body suddenly tremble, and then the sounds ceased. The shrieking turned into silence. He opened his eyes to find himself standing on top of a sacrificial altar that was

several meters tall. He looked around.

The place was enormous. Up above was black earth, dotted with small crystals that shone like stars, casting a dim light on the surroundings. Nothing was very clear, as if everything were covered with gauze. Various buildings rose up out of the fog.

“How desolate! It seems like no one has been here for hundreds of years.” It was Chen Fan’s voice, drifting from some distance away. Eventually, he appeared, walking through the fog. In the direction from which he came could be seen another altar, several meters tall.

“The soil up above has restrictive spells cast on it. These are the Sect catacombs.” Xu Qing appeared from another direction. Dressed in her silver robe, she appeared matchlessly beautiful.

“I entered the Sect earlier than both of you,” said Chen Fan. “Once I performed guard duty at the main temple hall, so I know a few secrets that you two don’t. These are definitely the Reliance Sect catacombs. Directly above is the Outer Sect.”

Meng Hao walked off the altar to stand next to Chen Fan and Xu Qing. Looking around at the hazy images of buildings around them, he could see plenty of withered plants and flowers. Everything was deathly still.

“This fog is a restrictive spell,” said Meng Hao with a frown. “It’s making everything appear to be black and white. No color whatsoever.”

“Precisely,” said Chen Fan with a serious look. “Don’t attempt to touch it. Because of the Patriarch’s weak state, he’s lost control of it. Let us use our Vorpall Jades to find our places of enlightenment.” He looked at them. “We don’t know how much time we will have to gain enlightenment. Let’s all wait for each other, then leave together. Junior Sister Xu, Junior Brother Meng, I wish you success.” He cast his spiritual power into the Vorpall Jade, whereupon it emitted a blood-red glow and began to drift away. Chen Fan followed, soon disappearing into the distance.

Xu Qing nodded at Meng Hao, then followed the blood-red glow of her Vorpall Jade in a different direction.

Meng Hao looked around, then was about to activate his own Vorpal Jade when suddenly, a shrill shriek rang out. It grew closer and closer, until it seemed to be only about ten meters away.

Chapter 39: Patriarch Reliance!

Meng Hao's expression changed. He suddenly saw the fog roiling, and then about ten meters away a shrieking man appeared. He wore a long tattered robe as he charged toward Meng Hao.

He emanated a fierce heat, which transformed into a ruthless killing aura. Seeing him approach, Meng Hao retreated as fast as possible. This turn of events had happened too quickly. The figure advanced rapidly, and in the blink of an eye it was only three meters away. Suddenly, it caught sight of the Vorpall Jade in his hand, and its eyes filled with dread and fear.

Meng Hao's heart churned. He poured the spiritual power from within his body into the Vorpall Jade, and suddenly it began to glow blood-red. It illuminated the man in the dilapidated robe, allowing Meng Hao to see him clearly. He was middle-aged, his body gaunt, like some sort of evil spirit.

Blood-curdling screams shot out of his mouth as he retreated. Moving with incredible speed, he disappeared into the fog.

Sweat broke out on Meng Hao's forehead, and he took a deep breath. The feeling the middle-aged man gave him was the same feeling he got from Grand Elder Ouyang, boundless and majestic.

"Don't tell me he was a Cultivator of the Foundation Establishment stage?" Meng Hao hesitated, remaining on guard. He followed the direction of the blood-red light, moving forward carefully. After about half an hour, he stopped in shock. Several figures had appeared, and each of them seemed to have a Cultivation Base equal to Grand Elder Ouyang's. Some even seemed to be as powerful as Sect Leader He Luohua.

"Could they be... automatons?" Upon closer inspection, the figures didn't actually seem to be alive. They floated around him in circles, none of them approaching him, seemingly terrified of his Vorpall Jade.

Time passed enough for an incense stick to burn, and they slowly disappeared. Meng Hao continued forward numbly, his breathing agitated, a blank look in his eyes.

“This... this...” he murmured. Ahead of him was a mountain, approximately one hundred meters tall. An ordinary mountain would not cause Meng Hao to act in such away. This mountain was made... of Spirit Stones!

Countless Spirit Stones piled together to form a Spirit Stone Mountain!

Meng Hao had never seen so many Spirit Stones in his entire life. His head spun, and he unconsciously wanted to go take them, but after taking a single step forward, he stopped. The Spirit Stone Mountain was gray in color and seemed to be covered with a fine mist. It was a restrictive spell which prevented anything from touching it.

He struggled for some time, not quite willing to give up. When he reached a position about twenty meters from the Spirit Stone Mountain, he suddenly felt a fierce sense of imminent danger. Looking at the mountain with a sigh, he stopped in place.

He knew that if he got too close, his body and soul would be reduced to ashes.

At a loss for a long moment, he turned his head and reluctantly left the Spirit Stone Mountain behind.

More time passed as he followed the blood-red glow, enough for an incense stick to burn, and soon the hazy image of a building appeared in the fog ahead of him. It had a courtyard, filled with withered plants and weeds. A stone sat in the middle of the courtyard, about half the size of a person. It was the only thing in sight that was neither black nor white, nor was there any fog visible near it.

The Vorpal Jade floated toward the large stone, then stopped above it. The blood-red glow began to fade.

Meng Hao walked forward and inspected the area around the stone. This must be one of the areas for enlightenment. He sat down cross-legged onto the stone and looked at the Vorpal Jade floating in front of him. His eyes began to gleam.

“Throughout all these years, many people have come here, and none

have successfully achieved enlightenment. When the blood-red glow of the Vorpall Jade fades, it means the time to attempt enlightenment has arrived.” Meng Hao frowned. A strong desire burned in his heart to acquire the secrets of the Qi Condensation Manual. Originally, Wang Tengfei should have been given this opportunity. But Meng Hao knew that his latent talent was simply ordinary, and he had little chance of success.

He didn’t allow the Vorpall Jade to fade, but instead looked up at it, a strange light shining in his eyes. After a bit of time passed, he clenched his jaw, then grabbed it stubbornly.

“This time, I don’t care what happens; I will achieve the enlightenment of the Sublime Spirit Scripture!” Determination filled his voice as he slapped his bag of holding and produced the copper mirror. Grabbing a handful of Spirit Stones, he prepared to begin the duplication process.

Meng Hao had been a member of the Inner Sect for a month. Inner Sect disciples received significantly more Spirit Stones than Outer Sect disciples. Combine that with his profits from the shop as well as the Outer Sect disciples who were trying to ingratiate themselves to him, it ensured that his bag of holding contained many Spirit Stones.

But suddenly, his expression changed as he found that the Spirit Stones distributed by the Sect were incapable of duplicating the Vorpall Jade. It wasn’t that the copper mirror had lost its efficacy, but rather that there simply weren’t enough Spirit Stones. Even mid-grade Spirit Stones were useless.

He stared at the Vorpall Jade for a while before suddenly pulling out seven or eight of the extraordinarily large Spirit Stones he had left. He hesitated for some time, then ground his teeth. Eyes growing red, he put one of the Spirit Stones down onto the mirror, and before he could even put down another piece, the Copper Mirror began to glow with a blinding light, and instantly, fifteen pieces of Vorpall Jade appeared. Meng Hao stared, dumbfounded. Originally, he had assumed he would need multiple Spirit Stones to make it work. But then he ended up with fifteen of the Blood Crystals.

These were Blood Crystals, congealed from Patriarch Reliance's own blood. Seeing fifteen of them appear left Meng Hao stupefied.

"What... what kind of Spirit Stones are these?" He sat in a daze, thinking back to how he had used two thousand of them that time, and his heart ached.

These large Spirit Stones were definitely some type of extraordinary object.

For now, the most important thing to Meng Hao was the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He clenched his jaw and set aside the matter of the two thousand Spirit Stones. Extending a Blood Crystal, he caused it to fade. As it did so, the blood red glow settled around Meng Hao and an indistinct voice could be heard. He slipped into a dream-like trance, unaware of the passing of time.

At this same moment, Xu Qing and Chen Fan, in their respective enlightenment areas, were also surrounded by the blood-red glow. Their latent talent was beyond ordinary, so their chances of achieving enlightenment were somewhat greater. In Patriarch Reliance's meditation zone, everything was based on latent talent. So-called luck is the same.

After an indeterminable period of time passed, the red glow around Meng Hao faded, and he began to regain his senses. He seemed to be somewhat at a loss. After some time passed, he had completely recovered, and yet his mind was blank. Not even a scrap of information from the Sublime Spirit Scripture was there.

He sighed, having anticipated this all along. He took out another Blood Crystal and continued to seek enlightenment. Time passed, and even after having used up fourteen Blood Crystals, he still had not succeeded. His heart ached, and he wasn't sure if he should continue. Gnashing his teeth, he pulled out another large Spirit Stone and duplicated more of the Vorpal Jade Blood Crystals. Once again, he activated the blood-red glow, which then covered his body as he began to seek enlightenment.

By this time, the blood-red glow surrounding Xu Qing and Chen Fan had faded. However, they did not rise, instead choosing to remain seated in

meditation, not sure when enlightenment might occur.

As for Meng Hao, he seemed to have gone mad, continuously activating Blood Crystals, trying again and again to achieve enlightenment. Anyone who saw this scene would surely go crazy with jealousy.

After activating the twenty-seventh Blood Crystal, Meng Hao suddenly heard what sounded like a voice murmuring next to his ear in the dream-like trance world. He could clearly hear two words.

“Sublime... Spirit...”

When Meng Hao opened his eyes, they were filled with determination. Without hesitation, he pulled out the twenty-eighth Vorpall Jade Blood Crystal, and once again sought enlightenment.

By this time, Xu Qing and Chen Fan had returned to the altar to wait for Meng Hao. They were a bit surprised when they didn't see Meng Hao, but they weren't sure which direction he had headed in, so they couldn't easily search for him. They decided to sit in front of the altar and wait for him.

By the third day, they were beginning to grow impatient and also a bit worried. Of course, they did not even consider that he might have achieved enlightenment, but rather worried that some sort of accident had befallen him.

“Did something happen to Junior Brother Meng?” said Chen Fan worriedly.

Xu Qing didn't respond, but she looked worried.

After a bit of discussion, they decided to begin looking for him. Unfortunately, because of the frequent appearance of the automatons, their search went quite slowly.

Meanwhile, Meng Hao sat, hair disheveled, eyes bloodshot, murmuring to himself. His words made no sense; they seemed to simply express his desire for the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He pulled out the forty-third Blood Crystal, and the thick, red glow again surrounded him. In fact, the area he was in never lacked the red glow. Meng Hao had gone all out in his search for enlightenment. If he ran low on Blood Crystals, he simply duplicated

more.

As of now, he could clearly hear the voice in his ear, but just couldn't commit it to memory. He could only continue on in another attempt.

There was something that nobody, not Chen Fan or Xu Qing, nor frenzied Meng Hao, had noticed. After the Blood Crystal ceased to glow, it would transform into a barely discernible blood-red light, which would then enter into the ground and pass into a secret chamber below the catacombs.

There, a withered body sat cross-legged, seemingly lifeless. The room was filled with the feeling of death.

Every time one of the blood-red lights entered the room, the body would assimilate it, and begin to change slightly. By the time the third light entered the body, there seemed to be some shred of life in it.

The light of life was dim, though, and the body was unable to do anything except sit there.

This was Patriarch Reliance. The Vorpall Jade Blood Crystals were congealed from his own blood, and contained his Qi. After being activated, they would return to him, continuing his life. Without them, he would be thoroughly dead.

Originally, he had planned to postpone his death in this fashion, until the very last spark of his ruthless and ambitious life was extinguished, whereupon he would pass into death. He was already in a state of despair. He spent most of his time in deep sleep, awaking only occasionally, and briefly, whereupon he would sink back into slumber. He had no energy to waste on superfluous matters.

As for the Vorpall Jade, this was an arrangement he had prepared many years ago. Were it not for them, he would have passed into death hundreds of years ago.

"These are the last three pieces of Vorpall Jade..." Now that they had returned, he had regained consciousness. He sighed and went back to sleep, knowing that he would probably never wake up again.

And yet suddenly, a fourth blood-red light entered the secret chamber and fused with his body. He woke again, shocked.

“I am... already out of Vorpall Jade. Could I have remembered incorrectly... Hm?” Even as he talked to himself, a fifth blood-red light appeared, making its way into his body.

He observed, dumbstruck, as a sixth, seventh, eighth blood-red light appeared... By the third day, countless blood-red lights had appeared, one after another, continuously fusing with his body. Patriarch Reliance's heart surged with excitement, and his face filled with hope. Suddenly, his eyes opened.

“These... holy hell, these are clearly not my blood, but they are definitely my Blood Crystals. What's going on? What the hell is going on?”

Chapter 40: Sublime Spirit Scripture

At the same moment that Patriarch Reliance opened his eyes, Meng Hao activated the fiftieth Vorpall Jade Blood Crystal. His head vibrated violently, and a scriptural text floated around him. Each and every character of the scripture emitted a bright golden light which pierced through his body. It completely overpowered the blood-red glow, leaving behind a glowing golden aura.

As the golden aura spread out, Meng Hao began to change. His Core lake churned violently as it began to take on a golden hue. As the lake water became gold, a thunderous roar sounded out, transforming his entire body.

His body filled with loud cracking sounds. His bones grew longer, his blood and flesh grew stronger. In an instant, he grew more powerful, both inside and outside.

His Qi vessels seemed to be as transparent as crystal, completely integrated into his physical body. His hair grew longer as he transitioned into a new state according to the mnemonics of the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

More time passed, approximately six hours, and then another boom sounded out inside Meng Hao. When he opened his eyes, they shined with a golden light.

Time passed, and the golden glow faded. He looked excited. Within his mind he could clearly see a mnemonic, branded indelibly onto his consciousness. He understood every single line. This was ... the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

This was something that could cause blood to spray like rain in the outside world. This was the Qi Condensation manual that countless Sects would fight like mad for. And here it was, inside Meng Hao's head.

After the six hours of transformation, Meng Hao was still at the sixth level of Qi Condensation. But as for his new Cultivation method, it could be counted as one of the three best in the entire Nanshan continent.

This good luck was something that even the disciples of the great clans and Sects would have a hard time achieving.

Using the Cultivation method of this Qi Condensation manual, if Meng Hao was able to reach the Foundation Establishment phase, then he would definitely be able to establish a Flawless Foundation. In addition, his spiritual power would be much deeper than that of his contemporaries. Perhaps it would not be the most powerful, but as time passed, the power would slowly accumulate, and by the time he reached the Foundation Establishment stage, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, he would have a Flawless Foundation rarely seen in the world!

As of right now, if he ran into Wang Tengfei, he would not be put into the precarious position he had been that day. In fact, he could now simultaneously control ten flying swords without losing any of their dexterity. His power had doubled!

Filled with excitement, Meng Hao clenched his fists, his heart filling with intense longing. After a while he took a deep breath, descended from the stone slab, and walked off.

At the moment, Patriarch Reliance was going wild with even more excitement than Meng Hao. Upon opening his eyes, he could see Meng Hao, as well as Chen Fan and Xu Qing. He waited eagerly for Meng Hao to produce another Blood Crystal, then watched in a daze as Meng Hao suddenly achieved enlightenment.

“Dammit, dammit. I should never have placed the enlightenment field out there. No, no, no. If I didn’t, how could I get the young pups to come here in the first place. But, but, but.. why did he have to gain enlightenment with only fifty blood crystals? A hundred would be better, two hundred, at least three hundred. If there were five hundred, I wouldn’t need to continue meditating here!” Patriarch Reliance was filled with depression. This was his greatest hope, and he was watching it disappear before his eyes. Without Blood Crystals to replenish himself, he could only continue on wasting away. And yet he knew there was nothing he could do.

“I didn’t do myself any favors that year. I closed myself up in here with no way out, and it’s very difficult to transmit my voice out. As far as magic goes, I’m currently too weak to do much of anything. What to do? What to do? I have to think of something...” His face grew anxious as he watched Meng Hao meet Xu Qing and Chen Fan out in the catacombs above the secret chamber. They proceeded toward the altar, clearly preparing to leave.

“If I caused all of the members of the Cultivation World of the State of Zhao to come here, I could use the power of their Cultivation Bases to break me out of this meditation zone. If I can break out, then I can absorb their life force, then have a chance at my Second Severing.” Patriarch Reliance gnashed his teeth, squeezing as much as he could out of his weak Cultivation base, then slapping his right hand down onto the ground. It began to rumble.

At that same moment, Meng Hao was trying to come up with an excuse for why he had gone missing for those few days, and why his body looked different. Chen Fan smiled and nodded, and Xu Qing, seeing that Meng Hao wasn’t harmed, didn’t say anything. The three of them stepped up onto the altar, getting ready to depart.

Suddenly a roaring sound filled the air, and the entire catacombs began to shake. Their expressions changed as a giant crack split the earth in front of them and a massive stone stele slowly lifted up. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, and it had finally completely emerged.

It was approximately ten meters tall, inscribed with golden characters. It was a scripture, none other than the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture!

The three of them stared in shock, especially Meng Hao. After all the trouble he had gone through to acquire the Qi Condensation manual, here it was in front of him. He looked at it in a daze. But after examining it further, a strange expression appeared on his face. The first two lines of the scripture inscribed on the stele were accurate, but the rest was a complete fabrication. It appeared to be filled with abstruse mysteries, but since Meng Hao knew the details of the true scripture, he could tell instantly

that this one was false.

He hesitated for a moment but didn't say anything.

Chen Fan's eyes glittered. He walked forward to stand beneath the stele, as did Xu Qing. They looked at it for some time, then exchanged shocked glance.

"We should take this with us," said Xu Qing slowly, "and let the Sect Leader decide what to do with it."

Meng Hao blinked, then nodded as if he completely agreed.

When Patriarch Reliance saw this, he laughed, more than pleased.

"Take it, take it, quickly! Take it out and let as many people know as possible. Hahaha! I'm so smart. I was worried people might break in here during my meditation, so I prepared that false stele. Of course, fearing it might be identified as false, I prepared a little trick. Once it's removed from this place, it will project a sign into the sky which people in all directions will be able to see. Originally it was designed to cause harm, but now, it's going to be quite helpful to me. Excellent. Excellent!" Excitement filled Patriarch Reliance's heart, but then suddenly, his eyes widened.

"We must not!" said Chen Fan in a dignified voice. After examining the stele carefully, his face filled with resolution. He shook his head, looking at Meng Hao and Xu Qing. "This stele is extremely important. If we take it out, then we would be bringing calamity upon the Sect. If an outsider learned of its existence, it could bring about our destruction. Let's each of us use a jade slip to make a copy of the scripture inscribed onto the stele. That way, we can take the contents out, but leave the stele in place. That is the safest method." Chen Fan's face was filled with sincerity and righteousness. What he said was completely selfless in nature, and also took the safety of the Sect into consideration. Xu Qing nodded, and Meng Hao, of course, did not disagree. They immediately copied the contents onto their jade slips, then stood onto the altar and make their departure.

Patriarch Reliance watched on in shock, then let out a furious howl.

"Dammit! Dammit! I will crush this generation's Sect Leader! How could

you let a guy like this into the Inner Sect? He's completely honest and upright, which I despise! In my day, everyone in the Sect was dark and crafty. Take the scripture and keep it secret, that's a real disciple of my Sect. As for you, you righteous little pup, you... You've brought about my death!! Why did you have to stop them? Dammit! My Cultivation base! I, I, I..." Patriarch Reliance was so furious that his body trembled. He ground his teeth, and with an air of abandon, held his breath for a moment, then let out a low shout. He slapped the top of his own head, then spat up a mouthful of blood. The blood transformed into a shapeless blood-red glow, which then began to send a reverberating hum throughout the secret chamber.

Amidst the reverberations, the blood-red glow suddenly shot toward Meng Hao and the others as they left the catacombs.

As soon as they stepped foot into the main temple hall of the Reliance Sect, as soon as He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang saw them, before they could even open their mouths, the blood-red glow shot out. None of them noticed.

Suddenly a thunderous sound rang out, and a bright light spread out, millions of meters in all directions, turning the entire sky bright red. Then, in the middle of it all, amidst a multitude of colors, appeared a strange sign.

There were a multitude of characters. Most of the characters weren't able to be seen clearly, but two were. They read...

Sublime Spirit...

The sign filled heaven and earth in all directions. The multitudinous characters of the scripture glowed brightly, especially the two characters "Sublime Scripture," shining out across the entire State of Zhao. Within the three Great Sects of the State of Zhao, all the disciples stared up in astonishment at the strange phenomenon. Streak after rainbow-like streak flew from the various closed-door meditation zones as multiple Sect Patriarchs emerged.

"This...."

“The Sublime Spirit Scripture!!”

“The Sublime Spirit Scripture has appeared. It appears to be located in the Reliance Sect. Could it be... could it be that the legendary Qi Condensation manual really is there?”

In the space of a moment, powerful members of several great Sects of the Southern Domain emerged from meditation. For the Sublime Spirit Scripture and the Qi Condensation manual to appear was an exciting matter. Without hesitation, they shot from the Southern Domain directly toward the State of Zhao. They all feared that if they weren't fast enough, their opportunity could be lost to the other powerful Southern Domain clans, or other Sects.

In the Southern Domain, the wind had shifted.

Prismatic streaks of light shot toward the Reliance Sect, as nearly twenty Cultivators from the three great Sects of the State of Zhao moved into action. The weakest among them was of the Foundation Establishment stage. Six were of the Core Formation stage. They cut through the sky with earth-shattering power.

Chapter 41: A Sensation in the State of Zhao!

When the sign appeared in the sky above the Reliance Sect, all of the disciples in the Outer Sect stared up in awe and shock, their minds buzzing. Their eyes filled with vacant looks, unable to comprehend what they were seeing.

Looking at the golden characters filling the sky, their hearts trembled. Fatty, who was filing his teeth with the fish-scale sword, made choking sounds, narrowly avoiding stabbing himself in the tongue as he gaped at the scene.

Shangguan Xiu, who sat in secluded meditation, suddenly lifted up his head. When he saw what was happening, his body began to tremble, and his eyes shined with disbelief. His face changed, as if he had suddenly just thought of something incredibly frightening. He stood in a flash, and suddenly, a teleportation spell appeared that he had prepared years before.

As fast as possible, he stepped into the spell, then disappeared.

In the main temple hall on the East Mountain, as Meng Hao and the others appeared, He Luohua's face fell. Looking up into the sky, his face grew pale, and he staggered backwards a few paces.

Grand Elder Ouyang raced out of the main temple, looking up into the sky, his face grim.

"Did you touch anything in the Patriarch's meditation zone?" he asked, turning to look back at them. His expression was very solemn, as was his tone of voice.

"When we were just about to leave, a stone stele appeared," said Chen Fan, sounding pained. "We were worried that if we brought it out with us, it could bring disaster to the Sect. So instead, we made copies of it." He took out his jade slip, as did Meng Hao and Xu Qing. They handed them to Grand Elder Ouyang.

"This is..." Grand Elder Ouyang's brow furrowed, and then his eyes

shone with disbelief.

“There’s no need to study it, it’s fake,” said He Luohua with a long sigh. “The stone stele as well as the sign in the sky. They’re both fake.” He looked down at the ground, then shook his head.

“Other Sects from the State of Zhao will be arriving soon. The Reliance Sect will not be able to evade this disaster. They’re here for the Patriarch.” He flicked his sleeve, and a rumbling could be heard throughout the entire Reliance Sect. A soft light arose, covering everything.

“You three are Inner Sect disciples, go wait in the main temple hall.” Just as his voice sounded out, blurs of light whizzed through the sky from all directions, nearly twenty of them, accompanied by high-pitched whistling shrieks.

The blurs approached the shield which surrounded the Reliance Sect, and as they did, heaven and earth shook. The four mountain peaks trembled as if they might collapse. Silence suddenly filled the surrounding wild mountains. The wild beasts all trembled in fear, not daring to make even a single sound.

Of the twenty or so people in the sky, there were six who formed the nucleus of the group. Four were men and two were women, and they were all elderly. They wore luxurious gowns, and the power which emanated from their Cultivation Bases was petrifying.

Each of these six people had two or three Cultivators behind them, followers, each of whom had Cultivation Bases on par with Grand Elder Ouyang. These nearly twenty people were the most powerful people in all the State of Zhao, and here they were at the Reliance Sect, bearing down on it like dark clouds.

“Reliance Sect!” a voice boomed out, billowing like thunder. The buildings which comprised the Outer Sect seemed as if they would collapse at any moment. Large amounts of Outer Sect disciples coughed up blood, fear covering their faces.

“The Cold Wind Sect is powerful,” said He Luohua with a harrumph. His voice rang out like a thunderclap as he stood there on the mountain’s

peak, suppressing the voice which had just spoken. He raised his right hand, and a hum sounded out as an invisible wind sprang up. It shot toward the person who had just spoken, surrounding him, suddenly turning black and transforming into a massive shapeless mouth that seemed about to swallow up the Core Formation stage Cold Wind Sect eccentric. The man's face changed, and he retreated quickly without hesitation.

"Enough, enough," said one of the powerful Core Formation experts, looking down at He Luohua. His voice was light but filled with suppressive power. He wore a long, purple robe embroidered with images of flutes. Frowning, he raised his hand, and the shapeless black wind dissipated. "Fellow Daoist He, the sign in the heavens came from your Reliance Sect. Please hand it over to us."

A deathly silence filled the Outer Sect, as the disciples felt the shadow of death looming over them. Within the main temple hall, Meng Hao, Chen Fan and Xu Qing sat silently. They knew that any one of the people outside had Cultivation Bases so frightening they could annihilate all of them with the wave of a hand.

Meng Hao's heart thundered as he looked at them. It was his first time seeing people so powerful. His thoughts suddenly filled with an intense desire to become more powerful.

He Luohua stood on the peak of the East Mountain, looking up at the group of people. After some time passed, he sighed.

"What do you want me to hand over? I have no idea where that sign came from."

"Give in without a fight," said the man in the purple robe grimly. "Disperse the Reliance Sect's grand protective spell. Allow us to search freely. This is what we mean by handing it over. If you don't, then despite the fact that we are fellow Cultivators of the State of Zhao, we will destroy your grand spell and then exterminate the Reliance Sect."

"Exterminate the Reliance Sect..." He Luohua suddenly laughed, louder and louder. It echoed out throughout the Reliance Sect. As he laughed, he

saw Grand Elder Ouyang standing there next to him, looking as if he were ready to fight to the death. He also saw the three Inner Sect disciples sitting grimly in the main temple hall. Then he glanced at the crowds of Outer Sect disciples, covered in blood. He knew that they were without hope, helpless.

How could he fight back? How could he ensure that the Outer Sect disciples lived to see another day? How could he avoid this disaster...

“As long as I am the Sect Leader of the Reliance Sect, I will not allow outsiders to bully and humiliate us. But there’s really no way for me to protect everyone...” His laughter carried sorrow within it, but also a tiny shred of hope.

“Even if you don’t exterminate the Reliance Sect, I fear that it cannot continue on for very long. Therefore... as of today, the Reliance Sect is disbanded. I have no further need of these trivial mountains!” He flicked his sleeve and flew up into the air. Looking shocked, Grand Elder Ouyang followed him. They floated in the air, looking down at the Reliance Sect, at what had been their home for so many sixty-year cycles. Their expressions were filled with grief.

“Disciples, hear my order. The Reliance Sect is hereby disbanded! As of now, you are no longer its disciples. This world no longer contains any Reliance Sect!” Veins of blood appeared in his eyes. The twenty or so experts from the State of Zhao began to laugh coldly as they listened to He Luohua’s shocking words.

“Are you satisfied?” he asked. “Any treasures or signs here have nothing to do with me, nor with these Sectless pups beneath me. If you dare to hurt anyone, I will detonate the grand protective spell, and then... we can all perish together.” His voice was resolute, and the bitterness in his words caused the State of Zhao experts’ hearts to quaver a bit.

“Fellow Daoist He, since you have made this decision, of course we will not make things difficult for you,” said an old woman from among the six most powerful of the experts. “The Reliance Sect is disbanded. If you step aside, then we will not cause problems for any of the disciples. You can

rest at ease.” Her gaze was like lightning. As she looked over the Reliance Sect, she could tell that the object from which the sign had originated was located here, but was not being held by any of the people.

Meng Hao looked up into the sky, and as He Luohua’s words rang in his ears, he was reminded of the law of the jungle. Despite how powerful the Sect Leader was, he still had been forced to dissolve the Sect.

Chen Fan said nothing, but staggered back a few paces on unsteady legs. Xu Qing lowered her head.

“Hearing the words of the Fellow Daoist from Tianlao, I feel at ease.” He Luohua flicked his sleeve, and the grand protective spell dissipated. With that, he made to leave, followed by Grand Elder Ouyang.

Some among the group of people floating in the sky watched He Luohua with glittering eyes, clearly unwilling to allow him to leave. And yet their attention was captured by the prospect of being able to search the Reliance Sect.

Inside the main temple hall, Chen Fan’s face was pale. He took a few more steps back, until he was leaning up against the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

At that exact moment, a booming sound filled the sky and a multitude of lightning bolts approaching. A cold laughter rolled out, shocking all the Cultivators to the core. Even the faces of the experts from the State of Zhao appeared shaken.

“No one is permitted to leave,” the voice roared. A massive shield suddenly swept over the entire Reliance Sect, covering everything within countless kilometers in every direction. No one could leave, even if they wanted to.

He Luohua’s face changed. He looked up into the sky and caught sight of a massive Feng Shui compass, roughly one hundred meters in diameter. On top of it stood a beautiful woman wearing a luxurious, dark green robe. Her hair was bound by a phoenix hairpin. Dozens of Cultivators surrounded her, most of whom were female, and all of whom were extremely beautiful. Their expressions were arrogant and cold as they

looked down.

“Correct, no one is permitted to leave.” Suddenly, the air seemed to split, and a large, armored man appeared, laughing. He carried an enormous golden sword slung over his shoulder, and was followed by dozens of people, all of them big and tall, their faces filled with killing intent.

“Zhao Shanling of the Golden Frost Sect, Dao protector,” said the beautiful, middle-aged woman who stood in the center of the Feng Shui compass, her voice cold. “You certainly have a sensitive nose.” Her voice rippled out, filling the air.

“If the ladies of the Black Sieve Sect can come,” replied Zhao Shanjun with a laugh, “then why can’t the men of the Golden Frost Sect?”

Just then, a sigh rang out from outside the massive shield. A cold light shot down from the heavens, and as it approached, it pierced through the shining shield. In through the damaged section shot a flying sword nearly one hundred meters in length.

The primitive-looking, blue-colored sword flew in, surrounding by circulating wisps of frigid Qi which caused snowflakes to begin to fall in all the area surrounding the Reliance Sect. Standing on top of the sword was a middle-aged man.

He wore a long scholar’s robe, and held his hands clasped behind his back. He was the only person atop the massive sword, but he emanated the aura of a person who could stride among the heavens unhindered by anyone.

“The Solitary Sword Sect!” said He Luohua, his face changing. He knew the identity of this scholar from the Solitary Sword Sect, the number one Sect in the Southern Domain. Their Sect had a saying: Only a solitary sword need leave the sect, and the heavens shall be rattled.

Chapter 42: Who Dares to Touch Him!?

“So, it turns out it’s Fellow Daoist Zhou Yanyun,” said the beautiful, middle-aged woman, greeting him with clasped hands. Even hulking Zhao Shanling gave him a silent salute in greeting, a look of fear hidden in his face.

Seeing all these sudden developments, Meng Hao’s heart began to pound. This was the first time he had seen so many powerful people from so many Sects. He was especially impressed by the appearance of the members of the three Great Sects from the colossal Southern Domain that Chen Fan had told him about.

“The Southern Domain...” Meng Hao sucked in a deep breath. Xu Qing stood next to him looking calm. It was impossible to tell what she was thinking.

In the back of the main temple hall, Chen Fan, pale-faced, sadly lifted his right hand up and pushed down on a hidden spot on the statue.

Immediately, the entrance to Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone closed without a sound and disappeared. Actually, no one inside or outside of the Sect caught any sense whatsoever that this was happening, not even Zhou Yanyun and the others from the Southern Domain.

“Patriarch, Disciple Chen will keep you safe and sound,” he said, his voice filled with righteousness. “I will not allow any of these people to disturb your meditation.” He was faithful and true to the Sect, willing to protect it even at the greatest risk. When his plan succeeded, he let out a sigh, feeling not even the slightest regret.

Meanwhile, in the secret chamber beneath the Reliance Sect catacombs, Patriarch Reliance watched the proceedings triumphantly, filled with excitement.

“Soon, they will find my meditation zone entrance. Then they will charge in and break open my hidden chamber. At long last, I will no longer be stuck in here.” Even as he excitedly spoke these words, his face suddenly changed.

“This... This... Dammit! You... You... What are you doing?!” He watched as Chen Fan, with utmost caution, began to move. Patriarch Reliance watched on in a daze as the entrance to the meditation zone quietly disappeared without a trace. He couldn’t believe it.

Of course, the failsafe had been set up by him years ago as a backup in case a powerful adversary arrived. He had passed on the secret to his successors, and it had been handed down through the generations, the method to prevent outsiders from entering the meditation zone.

Once it was activated, no one would be able to find the entrance, excepting for someone at the Spirit Severing stage. At the time he had set it up, he had been filled with pride, for he knew that he would be perfectly safe.

But he had never imagined that this day would arrive, years later. He had actually forgotten about the whole arrangement, but ... there were others who had not.

“Damnation! I should have left orders not to accept any people of moral character into the Sect! No righteous people, no good people. Kid, you, you, you...” He sat there in a daze, muttering to himself, wanting to weep, but having no tears to shed. He thought of the stone stele, of his carefully laid plans, of the blood he had sacrificed, and how it was all ruined by one person. Of course, this person’s intentions were good, but as he thought about his unflinching bravery and faithful demeanor, Patriarch Reliance began to tremble.

Just when he felt he was at the height of despair, Zhou Yanyun of the Solitary Sword Sect arrived. He gazed over the Sect, casting his senses across it, as did the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect and hulking Zhao Shanling. With their powerful senses, they poured over the Reliance Sect, searching it in thorough detail.

The experts from the State of Zhao watched on in fear. And then, they too began to search about with their senses.

After some time, Zhou Yanyun of the Solitary Sword Sect frowned. He could sense the Qi of the Sublime Spirit Scripture within these mountains,

but also knew that it was not in the possession of any of the Reliance Sect disciples. He just couldn't find it.

It was not just him. The beautiful woman, as well as Zhao Shanling, also frowned. They descended to the ground and began to search about in person.

The experts from the State of Zhao did the same, and soon people filled the Reliance Sect. Meng Hao and the others were kicked out of the main temple hall, whereupon it was searched to the point of being wrecked. In the sky, the strange sign began to fade, and yet, no one had found even a single clue.

People even descended into the underground areas to search, and yet, they came up empty-handed.

They watched the sign slowly disperse, transforming into a crystalline glow that eventually disappeared. The Qi of the Sublime Spirit Scripture disappeared, too, as if it had come and gone with the sign.

The Reliance Sect slowly began to quiet down. No valuable treasures had been found. Even the dragon's cave in the black mountain had been searched. As for the corpse of the dragon, it had been removed some time ago by Wang Tengfei, leaving the cave empty.

As dusk fell, the search reached its conclusion. The three members of the Southern Domain's Great Sects looked somewhat embarrassed. They had expended Spirit Stones to teleport here, and yet had come up empty-handed. They were left with the feeling of loss.

"This kid isn't bad," said Zhou Yanyun, standing on his massive sword, floating in mid-air. His eyes swept across the land, falling onto Chen Fan. "If you are willing to become a disciple of the Solitary Sword Sect, then come with me to the Southern Domain." During his search for the Sublime Spirit Scripture, he had noticed Chen Fan's latent talent, and it had met with his approval. He especially took note of Chen Fan's righteous air, which fell in line with the Cultivation practices of the Solitary Sword Sect.

As he spoke, he lifted a finger, and Chen Fen floated up into the air. In

front of the eyes of Meng Hao, Xu Qing, and all the Outer Sect disciples, he drifted toward Zhou Yanyun.

The experts from the State of Zhao looked on in envy, knowing how lucky the young man was. He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang looked on silently, their feelings somewhat mixed. In the end, they knew that the Reliance Sect was too small; they would be very happy if an Inner Sect disciple had the chance to walk a better path.

“Disciple Chen Fan...” began Chen Fan, his face filled with conflicting emotions. He looked down at the Reliance Sect, at He Luohua and Grand Elder as they silently nodded their approval. He looked at Meng Hao and Xu Qing. Then, determination filled his face. “I offer my thanks to the good will of the senior generation,” he said, lifted his head up as he looked at Zhou Yanyun. “But disciple is a member of the Reliance Sect. In this life, I cannot join another.” He knew that if he agreed, he would have much better opportunities in the future. But there are some things that a man just cannot do. For him, there would be only one Sect in his life.

His words seemed to leave the experts from the State of Zhao quite moved. Disciples like this were a treasure to any Sect! And yet, most of them also sported looks of pity on their face. Refusing the Solitary Sword Sect in this manner was courting death.

He Luohua said nothing. He looked at Chen Fan, feeling even more conflicted. He sighed inwardly, wondering how the young man could be so stubborn. There was no need.

Zhou Yanyun’s eyes glittered. He stared at Chen Fan for a while, then dryly said: “Do you know what the words ‘Solitary Sword Sect’ mean in the Southern Domain?”

Chen Fan was silent for a moment, then nodded. He had studied the ancient records, so of course he knew about the Solitary Sword Sect, the number one Sect in the Southern Domain.

“Then you must know my status in the sect.” Zhou Yanyun’s expression was grim, and his eyes radiated killing intent. Even the sky around him grew dark, as if it were being torn by the power of his Qi.

"I know of the Solitary Sword Sect, as well as you, Elder Zhou," said Chen Fan in a soft voice. "Everyone knows you. You are the current generation's Dao Protector. Your Cultivation base is profound, and your name has rocked the Southern Domain."

"So, you know me. Then you know what you are giving up by passing up this opportunity." His voice grew colder, as did the temperature of the air.

"The Solitary Sword sect has a history tens of thousands of years old. Their Cultivation shrines, their proliferation of powerful experts, the meteoric progress made by the Sect's members, Chen Fan of the junior generation is well aware of all these things." He held his head high, unwilling to back down. His glistening eyes held no sign of regret.

Zhou Yanyun looked at him, then suddenly began to laugh loudly.

"Originally I planned to make you an ordinary Outer Sect disciple. But with a temperament like this... Excellent. Excellent! You will be my personal disciple!" Zhou Yanyun's smile was filled with admiration. With a flick of a sleeve, he pulled Chen Fan onto the massive sword and prepared to leave.

Seeing the Solitary Sword Sect's actions, the beautiful, middle-aged woman realized that taking a qualified disciple back with her was the only way to prevent this trip from turning out to be a complete loss.

"This girl isn't bad. The Black Sieve Sect wants her."

She had long since taken notice of Xu Qing. She approved of her beauty and coldness. Without waiting for Xu Qing to speak, she bent her finger, pulling her up onto the Feng Shui compass. Everyone watched in envy as she began to transform into a diffraction of light.

Fatty stood there, filing away at his teeth. In his eyes, the Sect being disbanded meant that he was now free. He was filled with a confused happiness. He had only been gone a few years, which meant that when he got back to Yunjie County, the house and the bride that his father had prepared would still be waiting. Soon, he would be able to enjoy the life of a rich person.

“Too bad I won’t be able to see Meng Hao. Oh well. We’re brothers, so I’ll help him pay back the money he owes to Steward Zhou. Eventually, I will absorb the wealth of all the surrounding villages, and then, the entire State of Zhao. Hahaha! I, Li Fugui, will be the richest person in the world!” The more he thought about his plans, the more happier he was. He stood there, filing at his teeth and feeling the anticipation for the future.

Right about then, hulking Zhao Shanling of the Golden Frost Sect frowned. He was a bit late in acting. After seeing two of this tiny Sect’s Inner Sect disciples taken away, he glanced at Meng Hao. He was a bit taken aback as he noticed a faint trace of Demonic Qi within him. Muttering to himself, his gaze swept the rest of the sect, whereupon he caught sight of Fatty standing in the crowd of Outer Sect disciples. He stared in astonishment as Fatty filed at his teeth with his flying sword. His eyes shone, and he completely forgot about Meng Hao and his Demonic Qi.

“How exactly is this fatty practicing Cultivation? He’s managed to develop a set of Spirit Teeth. In our Sect, the technique to develop Spirit Teeth has been lost for eight hundred years. With Spirit Teeth, you can crush Spirit Stones with your mouth, which is necessary to practice THAT technique. It seems this trip wasn’t a waste after all. If we take this kid back with us, he will be a true treasure in our Sect.” His eyes glittering fiercely, Zhao Shanling lifted his right hand and snatched up the stupefied Fatty. “Kid, from now on, you are an Inner Sect disciple of the Southern Domain’s Golden Frost Sect.” He tossed wide-eyed Fatty into a gray-colored sack. Fatty’s shrill cries could be heard faintly as he disappeared inside.

Zhao Shanling turned. Followed by his retinue, he headed toward the immaterial fissure.

And thus, he, along with Zhou Yanyun and the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect, all prepared to take their leave.

But then, Zhao Shanling suddenly remembered something. He turned back to look at the Reliance Sect, and his gaze came to rest on Meng Hao.

As he did, he stopped in his tracks, shocked. The beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect, as well as Zhou Yanyun, also stopped.

Meng Hao began to tremble. As the hulking man looked at him, it seemed as if he could see through him completely, as if his vision could pierce to his deepest parts, even to the Demonic Core which rested in his Core lake.

“This is...” the hulking man’s eyes narrowed, then began to shine. A moment ago, he hadn’t cared at all about this weak-looking disciple and had only thought to take Fatty. But something caught his eye about Meng Hao. He turned, and began to walk toward him.

“I want this kid too!” he said in a booming voice. Meng Hao’s face turned cold, and he felt as if his body were about to shatter into pieces. His Core lake seethed, and the Demonic Core felt as if it were about to be ripped out of his body by some invisible force.

Pain filled him, and he broke out in cold sweat. He once again felt as if his body were being crushed, and he clenched his fists tightly. There was nothing he could do.

At that exact moment, a booming sound rang out from within the Reliance Sect. It was a voice, so powerful that it shook the heavens and earth. In the midst of moving upon Meng Hao, Zhou Yanyun and the beautiful middle-aged woman, as well as the hulking man, suddenly looked shocked. They turned their heads, their eyes filled with astonishment.

“I have one heir left in the Reliance Sect. Who dares to touch him!?”

Chapter 43: The Sole Heir

Patriarch Reliance sat in his secret chamber in the Reliance Sect catacombs, his hair disheveled, his eyes red. He looked as if he had gone mad. His plans were about to go awry; in moments, everyone would leave, and if that happened, they wouldn't come back. He watched in sorrow as the Golden Frost Sect Cultivator began to make a move towards his only remaining Inner Sect disciple. Fury rose in him, and without holding anything back from his Cultivation base, he sent his voice thundering out.

It shook the Heavens and stirred up a gale-forced wind which swept back and forth. In the wild mountains surrounding the Reliance Sect, trees were uprooted as the tempest battered the land. Many other trees were simply splintered into pieces until the tempest became a dark green color, filled with flashing lightning. The experts from the State of Zhao floated in mid-air looking on, dumb with amazement.

Even Zhou Yanyun from the Solitary Sword Sect looked confused. Carrying Chen Fan's unconscious form in his arm, he retreated. The massive sword began to hum, and then he was surrounded by multitudinous sword auras.

The beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect also looked surprised. She retreated, reaching down to slap the surface of the Feng Shui compass. It suddenly expanded to twice its original size.

As for Zhao Shanling from the Golden Frost Sect, he took a deep breath and retreated backward, his fingers moving in incantation patterns. The golden sword flew out from behind him, and his entire body glowed with a golden light, making him look like some sort of celestial general.

The three of them stared around at the Reliance Sect, as if they were facing a deadly opponent.

Meng Hao, who still stood on the East Mountain, looked at this change of events, at the dark green tempest which filled the sky with its deafening roar, filled with unparalleled might. He found it difficult to breathe. His eyes wide, he moved backwards, his clothing whipping in the frenzied

wind. He grabbed onto a boulder and held on, lest he be sucked up by the wind. And yet, his eyes shined. Patriarch Reliance's words just now had reminded him of what he had read on the first page of the manual all those years ago when he had first arrived at the Reliance Sect.

He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang also looked surprised. This turn of events was too sudden, shocking them to the extent that it almost seemed as if their Cultivation bases would crumble under the might of the tempest.

"Let it be known, the Patriarch is still here!" roared Patriarch Reliance, deep in the catacombs. "No one is permitted to touch the kid surnamed Meng! He is my only Inner Sect disciple left. If he dies, I will have no hope!!" Gritting his teeth, he slapped the top of his head, and his body shook. He spat out a mass of blood, then continued to hit himself over and over again, spitting out more and more blood. His body began to spin.

A look of hatred appeared in his eyes. After hitting himself seven or eight times, a massive amount of blood had been spat out. It congealed together, then shot toward the stone wall with a resounding boom. It banged against the wall, and nearly half of it was gone by the time it was able to punch through.

Having accomplished this, Patriarch Reliance's head tilted to the side and he slipped into unconsciousness. He almost seemed dead, as if only the refined blood contained his awareness.

The refined blood burst out from the secret chamber and through the catacombs. Outside, in plain view of the awestruck bystanders, it spread out to cover the entire Reliance Sect into a roiling red fog. Within the mists of the fog boomed the sound of lightning as it continued to expand. In an instant, it had covered the surrounding mountainous region for countless kilometers in every direction. From the outside, it appeared as if the entire area had turned into a red sea of fog!

The fog churned and the roaring sound lifted into the skies. All of the Cultivators present were stunned, and their shock was visible on their faces, even Zhou Yanyun and the others.

Within the red fog, the Reliance Outer Sect disciples all lapsed into unconsciousness, uninjured. On the other hand, Sect Leader He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang were pushed away, out of the fog. Their faces went pale as they watched on in astonishment.

The fog roiled ceaselessly, and the thunderous roar continued on until it seemed there was nothing in the world except its resonant booming. The land was like an ocean of fog, the sky colorless. Then, the fog began to move, forming together into a gigantic face.

The size of the face left everyone filled with fear.

The face was that of an old man, calm, powerful and domineering. His eyes were closed, but as soon as He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang saw him, their heads began to spin. They recognized this as none other than... Patriarch Reliance

“Patriarch...” said Grand Elder Ouyang, his eyes wide, filled with excitement.

“He... He’s not dead after all!!” The experts from the State of Zhao cried out in alarm, their faces draining of blood. One after another, they fled, their hearts trembling.

Suddenly, Patriarch Reliance’s colossal red-fog face opened its eyes a crack. They opened just a sliver, and yet they emitted a trembling power which seemed as if it could crack open the earth.

He glanced up at the Heavens, and they seemed to be bloodshot. As his gaze swept around, the dark green tempest smashed into the red fog, seemingly transforming into Patriarch Reliance’s long, dark hair.

As he watched this, Zhou Yanyun’s face went pale and he spat out a mouthful of blood. As he retreated backwards his massive sword suddenly split in two, leaving behind only a stump of a blade. His eyes filled with dread, and his heart pounded. His Cultivation base was at the Nascent Soul stage, but caught underneath this gaze, his Nascent Soul began to wither. He retreated even faster, pulling out a blue-colored talisman, which he activated. It covered his body, as well as unconscious Chen Fan, as he sped off into the distance. A powerful voice seemed to echo in his

heart, telling him that his opponent was not at the Nascent Soul stage, but rather, the almighty Spirit Severing stage.

As the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect saw all of this happening, the Feng Shui compass beneath her suddenly began to emit popping sounds, and was riddled with cracks. Then it exploded into pieces. This woman had never been so afraid. Spitting out blood, she retreated with an unconscious Xu Qing. The only thing that filled her mind was: flee!

As for tall, hulking Zhao Shanling, his body seemed as if it were being attacked by a falling mountain. He retreated backwards, coughing up blood. The golden sword in front of him shattered into fragments. His face pale, he turned and dashed away, fleeing toward the immaterial crack.

The experts from the State of Zhao all spit up blood. The Foundation Establishment stage Cultivators felt the spiritual energy in their body snapping, and they knew their longevity had been damaged. Their faces grew wan.

On top of the East Mountain, the red fog curled around Meng Hao, circling around his waist. Face pale, he continued to grip the boulder. To the onlookers, however, Meng Hao's position was exactly between Patriarch Reliance's eyebrows.

"You forced my Reliance Sect to disband, and you've attempted to slaughter my only heir! You truly have gall!" His world-shaking voice boomed out in all directions, and as it did, three red beams of light shot out, shooting straight toward Zhou Yanyun, the beautiful woman and the hulking man from the Golden Frost Sect.

"I, Zhou, am an Elder of the Solitary Sword Sect, a Protector of the Dao. If Patriarch Reliance kills me, the Solitary Sword Sect will destroy you!"

"Patriarch Reliance, please cease your anger. Junior is a disciple of the Black Sieve Sect, my grandfather is Ping Sandao, your good friend!"

"Junior was mistaken, Patriarch, please calm your anger."

Words poured out of the three people as the red light pursued them;

Patriarch Reliance let out a cold snort.

“Beat it, you three!” The three red beams disappeared. “Go back and ask your Sect Elders if they’ve forgotten about the Blood Pact we made all those years ago. The State of Zhao is my realm. Anyone who dares step foot here cannot blame me for annihilating them. As for those three other disciples, take them away, I don’t need them.” Their faces pale, the three Southern Domain disciples disappeared.

Seeing this, the State of Zhao Cultivators froze in place, trembling. Seeing Nascent Soul stage Cultivators act like that left them petrified. The most powerful among them was only at the Foundation Establishment stage.

The thousand-year-old legends about Patriarch Reliance had now come to being in front of their very eyes.

As the powerful, domineering voice boomed out, the fog began to roil and spin, with Meng Hao as its center. The fog congealed in front of him to form a long spear.

It was not red, but instead covered with talismanic inscribing of white, silver and gold. It appeared to be incredibly extraordinary.

“The Reliance Sect has been dissolved. So be it. But this kid is my only Inner Sect heir. If anyone dares to touch him...” His attention turned to Meng Hao. “In that case, Meng Hao, use this spear to exterminate that person! All of you, beat it!” His voice echoed out across the land. The State of Zhao experts immediately fled. What they didn’t seem to notice was that Patriarch Reliance’s voice had grown noticeably weaker. It was barely noticeable, but if one paid careful attention, it was definitely weaker.

The unconscious Outer Sect disciples suddenly lifted up into the air and flew away in all directions. Then, a turbulent, blood-red glow enveloped the entire Reliance Sect. No onlooker would have been able to see it, but Meng Hao could.

He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang watched on in a daze. Finally, shame appeared on He Luohua’s face. He lowered his head and saluted respectfully toward the blood-red shield. Then, he let out a light sigh,

turned, and disappeared into the distance.

Grand Elder Ouyang was silent. One by one, he took the Outer Sect disciples out into the wild mountains. Then he looked at the Reliance Sect from a distance. With a sigh, he departed.

He and He Luohua both knew that with the Patriarch's acknowledgment of the dissolution of the Sect, there was no longer such thing as the Reliance Sect.

Meng Hao stood within the blood-red glow, looking excited. He looked at the spear, which emitted a white, silver and golden glow. Suddenly and inexplicably, the spear, completely of its own volition, shot forward, combining with the fog to transform into the image of an old man in a red robe. It was Patriarch Reliance.

Clasping his hands in salute, Meng Hao said, "Disciple Meng Hao pays respects to the Patriarch." Without even thinking about it, he began a flood of eloquence: "You cast awe into the hearts of the people of the State of Zhao, and your name is even known in the Southern Domain. I have revered you ever since I joined the Sect. Every day I pay homage to your words from the beginning of the manual. I have constantly reaped rewards..."

"Very well, very well. You haven't done well in your studies. Let me tell you, kid, when I was your age, my flattery sounded much more natural than yours. Don't try to pull that stuff off on me." Patriarch Reliant glared at him, yet inwardly was a bit moved.

Meng Hao looked at him with a sheepish smile.

"Even though it's useless to flatter me, well I... never mind. Listen up. I was only able to use a sliver of my consciousness, so it wasn't easy to scare off those damned Nascent Soul stage Cultivators. I don't have much time at the moment before this form disappears." As he spoke, he began to grow more and more indistinct. "I need to rest for a year. When that year is up, you must use any means possible to attract every expert of the Foundation Establishment stage or higher from the State of Zhao to come to my meditation zone. If you can accomplish this, then I will give you an

incredible reward!” He raised his hand and pointed a finger at Meng Hao.

Instantly, information entered Meng Hao’s mind, and he now knew how to open the entrance to the meditation zone.

“Kid, you are the only heir to my Reliance Sect. Don’t get yourself killed. If you get killed, I will have to find a concubine to bury with you... I... I find it annoying to have to...” The sound of his voice continued to echo about, but his body had dissipated. Not a shadow remained.

Meng Hao stared blankly for some time before recovering. It was at this point that he realized that everything which had happened had been Patriarch Reliance’s attempt to scare away the outsiders.

“So he didn’t kill those three people... then why did he give me this spear?”

Chapter 44: The North Sea Reveals the Dao

In the entire expansive Reliance Sect, only Meng Hao remained, standing alone on the East Mountain. He watched the red light fade away, then lowered his head. The formerly bustling Outer Sect was now empty.

Elder Sister Xu had been taken away. Elder Brother Chen had gone to the Southern Domain. Even Fatty was gone. He had no idea when he would see them again. Would it be months? Years?

His status as an Inner Sect disciple, his three years in the Reliance Sect, they all became memories. The twisting autumn wind hit his face and lifted up his hair, blowing away the dust that had settled there.

He quietly sat down on the boulder. A long time passed, and eventually the stars peeked out one by one. Then dawn came. Meng Hao sighed and lifted his head.

“They’re all gone... and here I am, still in the State of Zhao.” Suddenly, Meng Hao missed home. Even though he had gotten rid of his old ancestral house in Yunjie County, he still missed his old bed and dilapidated bowls. Even more so, he missed Mount Daqing. He missed... he missed his kind, smiling mother, and his father, who had always seemed afraid of his mother.

It was all somewhat vague. Meng Hao shook his head, and as the rays of dawn crept out, he stood up. There was no need to search the Reliance Sect. Everything worth taking was long gone, pillaged by the experts from the State of Zhao. It was all was empty.

Meng Hao patted the dust off his clothes, then changed out of his Inner Sect silver robe, back into the scholar’s gown he had worn all those years ago. It was a spacious robe, but as he put it on, it felt a bit small. He stared at the rising sun and let out a sigh. Deep within him, his golden Core Lake seemed to bubble, and within it, the Demonic Core emitted spiritual power that filled and replenished his body.

“I’m not too far from the seventh level of Qi Condensation. I can feel the bottleneck.” He walked forward, slapping his bag of holding. Two flying swords emerged and floated down to his feet. He glided down the mountain and left the Reliance Sect.

Using this technique with the flying swords granted him the ability of flight. But similar to Elder Sister Xu with her Wind Pennant, it was only temporary flight, nothing long term.

Meng Hao moved ever more swiftly, speeding along throughout the mountain forests. Finally, he was able to leave the Reliance Sect region, a place he hadn’t left for three years. He flew throughout the seemingly endless wild mountains, eventually disappearing over the horizon.

Time passed, and maintaining his original speed, Meng Hao eventually emerged from the mountainous region after two days.

“I’m not sure how long it took Elder Sister Xu to bring me to the Sect,” he muttered to himself, looking back at the mountains. “It was a few days, but I was unconscious. In any case, I think her speed at that time would have been similar to my own now.”

To Cultivators, the State of Zhao is not very large. But to mortals, it is actually quite a vast region. In his studies, he had read about its geography, and though he had never personally travelled about in it, he was nevertheless somewhat familiar with the area.

“As of now I’m in the north of the State of Zhao. I shouldn’t be too far from Yunjie County.” Off in the distance, he could see what looked almost like a mirror laying on the flat land. That would be what was referred to as the North Sea.

“Now that I think about it, with a Wind Pennant, and being at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, Elder Sister Xu could fly temporarily, but it would drain her spiritual power relatively quickly. She couldn’t have flown very far away.” Meng Hao’s eyes flickered with longing. He had been away from Yunjie County for three years, and his desire to return was growing stronger. He knew that after crossing the North Sea, he would be about a half-day’s walk from Mount Daqing.

Breathing in deeply, he proceeded onward, eventually arriving at the shore of the North Sea. He looked down, and on the surface of the calm lake, he could see his reflection in the water. He was no longer a youth. He looked to be about 20 years of age. His face appeared steadfast and resolute, completely different from the ignorant, immature Meng Hao of the past.

Amidst the silence, a warm, hearty laugh rang out, breaking Meng Hao's train of thought.

"Hello, young sir, do you wish to cross the sea?" A small boat slid across the water, guided toward Meng Hao by an old man wearing a woven rush raincoat. His face was covered with the evidence of a life of hardship, but he spoke with a smile.

"I do not wish to trouble you, old sir," said Meng Hao, looking surprised. He hadn't been called 'young sir' for three years now.

"It's no trouble," said the old man. "I've been ferrying people across the ocean for many years. I really admire young, talented scholars like yourself." He pushed the boat up next to Meng Hao, who leaped easily onto the deck, offering his thanks.

There was a young girl inside the boat, seven or eight years old, her hair done up in two pigtails. She squatted in front of a little oven, tannings its flames as she boiled water. Steam wafted up.

Inside the pot of water was a bottle of alcohol.

"This is my granddaughter," said the old man as he turned the boat around. "Too bad she's a girl. If she were a boy, I would have sent her off to be a scholar. Young sir," he said with a smile, "where are you from?" The boat headed out toward the center of the lake. As the wind sprang up, the old man sat down next to the oven.

The little girl looked up at Meng Hao, her wide eyes innocent and charming.

"I am a young scholar from Yunjie County," Meng Hao said with a smile. "Below Mount Daqing." This type of mortal life caused him to think of his

life from before, three years ago.

“Yunjie County, that’s a good place! Great men lend their glory to a location. Many years ago, an auspicious sign appeared there. It even arose the notice of the officials.” The old man picked up the bottle of alcohol. “This weather is turning cold and my body can’t take it. Here, have a drink.” He extended the bottle toward Meng Hao. “Can you drink?”

Meng Hao knew the auspicious sign to which he referred. It had been ten years before, the day before his parents went missing. When he thought of this, his heart grew a bit melancholy. He hesitated for a moment, looking at the bottle. He had never drank alcohol before. Back in Yunjie County, he had lived in poverty, and there had been no alcohol in the Reliance Sect. He lifted up a glass and allowed the man to fill it, then took a drink.

A spicy warmth suddenly filled his heart, then slowly spread out through his body.

“Old sir, your conversation topics are somewhat out of the ordinary. Have you been running a ferry here for a long time?” Meng Hao gazed at the rippling green waves, then took another drink of alcohol. The alcohol burned its way down, and he thought of the Reliance Sect, of Elder Sister Xu, Elder Brother Chen and Fatty.

“Twenty years,” replied the old man with a laugh. “In my life, I’ve ferried many, many people across this North Sea. I’ve seen a lot of things, and of course, I’ve learned a lot about how people tend to have conversations. Please, don’t laugh at me. Who knows how many years this lake has been here? It’s seen a lot of people too. People remember it, and it remembers the people.” The old man lifted his glass and took a drink.

Meng Hao stared at him for a moment. This was the first time he had ever heard someone speak in such a fashion. He looked back at the lake, muttering to himself, seemingly lost in thought.

“This is obviously a lake,” he said suddenly. “Why do people call it the North Sea?”

The old man thought for a moment, then smiled. “Lakes can dry up,

grow quiet, and become still. If that happened, no living things would remain. But seas last forever, and can contain the water of countless rivers and lakes. Maybe people just didn't want the lake to ever go away, so they named it that way. When all is said and done, if you believe it's a lake, then it's a lake. If you believe it's a sea, then it's a sea."

When he heard the old man's words, Meng Hao's mind suddenly trembled. The hand holding the glass of alcohol began to quiver, and he stared out at the lake water, almost in a trance. He seemed to lose track of time.

Time passed, and the boat reached the shore. Meng Hao pulled out some silver that he had acquired from one of the disciples back at the Reliance sect and paid the fare. He gave the old man a deep bow of respect, then watched as the boat drifted off. His eyes shined with a strange light.

He didn't leave, but instead sat down cross-legged on the lakeshore, looking out at the waters, and the lone boat disappearing into the distance. He could hear the old man laughing.

"If you believe it's a lake, then it's a lake. If you believe it's a sea, then it's a sea..." The old man's voice echoed across the distance. It seemed as if... he were not disappearing into the distance, but rather... merging into it....

Meng Hao sat there in a trance, taking it all in. He sat for three days straight.

He didn't move at all during that time, instead staring silently at the lake, the old man's words echoing in his mind.

"Lakes can dry up, grow quiet, become still. If that happened, no living things would remain. But seas last forever, and can contain the water of countless rivers and lakes..." Meng Hao's eyes suddenly lit up. The golden Core Lake within him seemed boundless, but in his eyes it was still a lake.

"If I believe it's a lake, then it's a lake. If I believe it's a sea, then from now on... let it be a sea!" A thunderous sound filled him, and the Core Lake began to seethe and churn. Without the aid of any medicinal pills whatsoever, it suddenly expanded.

Meng Hao wasn't aware of any of this. His eyes were closed tightly; he had entered a strange state. The old man's words filled his mind. He didn't notice it, but around him, the boundless Spiritual Energy of heaven and earth had begun to gurgle up, surrounding his body and then entering it. Waves broke out across the North Sea, and within its churning arose a massive amount of Spiritual Energy, which rushed forth and surrounded Meng Hao.

The North Sea was revealing the Dao!

If, at this moment, a Core Formation Cultivator could see what was happening, he would be thoroughly shocked. This type of Dao enlightenment was only possible for someone at the Spirit Severing stage. In addition, it required a huge amount of fortune and luck. Yet here was Meng Hao, already reaching out to the threshold!

The reason he could succeed in this was in large part due to the Demonic Core within him. It was the Core of a Flying Rain-Dragon, an ancient beast whose tail could transform into a Demon. Actually, that year in which he had dreamed of the Flying Rain-Dragon, Meng Hao had already reached Dao enlightenment.

Three days passed, and finally Meng Hao opened his eyes. They glowed with a golden light. Within him, his Core Lake had increased by a shocking double. As he examined it, Meng Hao realized that this was no lake. This was a Core Sea!

He believed it to be a sea, therefore... it was a sea!

The seawater roared, and waves whipped about. The Demonic Core, as stable as ever in the depths, emitted Spiritual Energy which filled Meng Hao's entire body. Using the techniques he had learned from the Sublime Spirit Scripture, he circulated the energy. His body began to glow with a golden light, as if something had suddenly broken out within him. The golden light emanated around him for three meters in every direction.

Amidst the roaring, Meng Hao's Cultivation base suddenly climbed upwards, breaking through the sixth level bottleneck directly into the seventh layer of Qi Condensation.

Even though he had just broken through to the seventh layer, his power was the same as if he had already reached its peak. This was because in his dantian region was not a Core Lake, but a Core Sea!

Earlier, the Spiritual Energy which had built up in the North Sea for countless years had suddenly surged forth as if to help Meng Hao make his breakthrough.

Gradually, the Spiritual Energy of heaven and earth which surrounded him began to dissipate, as did the North Sea's Spiritual Energy. Slowly, the golden glow which emanated from Meng Hao also began to fade, and slowly he returned to his usual appearance. He sat there cross-legged. The golden light eventually left his eyes, although they continued to sparkle brightly.

He slowly stood up and looked out at the North Sea. With clasped hands, he saluted the sea deeply. His mind was filled with descriptions he had read about in the Reliance Sect's Magic Pavilion, of the various Demonic creatures of the Nanshan Continent. Wherever demons existed, there would be demons that appeared as mountains, demons that appeared as rivers, and demons that appeared as plants and animals.

"Today, the North Sea showed me the way. One day when my Cultivation base is high enough, I will return here and help you become a sea!" He gazed out at the North Sea. He wasn't sure whether or not this lake, which desired to be a sea, might be like the descriptions he had read about, something with life, a demonic life.

Regardless, it had helped him make a breakthrough in his Cultivation base, helped him turn his Core Lake into a Core Sea. He must repay the kindness. There was only one way: to help this lake become a sea!

After some time passed, Meng Hao turned and strode toward Mount Daqing.

Chapter 45: A Look Back at the Mortal World after Three Years

Autumn wind curled around Mount Daqing in the north of the State of Zhao. Most of the rattan vines had dried and withered, and leaves floated down from the mountain into the river below. Perhaps they, like that gourd bottle from years ago, would eventually reach the Milky Way Sea and then float on to the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands.

Beneath Mount Daqing lay three counties. Yunjie County was the most flourishing of the three. It wasn't very large, but it bustled with people. When market day came, people from the whole mountain region gathered there, and a hubbub of voices would fill the air.

On this day, a young man wearing a clean, blue scholar's robe walked into Yunjie, seemingly restless with emotion. Though he was a stranger, his face looked familiar. It was, of course, Meng Hao.

He walked down the familiar streets, passing houses and shops. As he strolled through the mortal world, he recalled many things from the past. This place contained his memories from childhood, the lonely bitterness of his youth, and his stubborn attachment to his studies. So many unforgettable events.

Passing a large courtyard, he said, "That would be where Miss Sun lives...." The walls which had seemed so tall in the past, now looked somewhat short. Past the walls were Miss Sun's bedchambers, a place that had been the subject of many fantasies in the past.

He had often imagined that Steward Sun would take a liking to him, and then offer him Lady Sun's hand in marriage. She was rumored to be as beautiful as a goddess.

Three years had passed, not a very long time, but to Meng Hao, it seemed as if an entire generation had come and gone.

Shaking his head emotionally, he was about to move on, when suddenly the main doors of the Sun mansion opened and a sedan chair emerged.

Meng Hao stopped. How often in the past had he looked into the courtyard, hoping to catch a glimpse into Lady Sun's bedchamber? His eyes flickered as he gazed at the sedan chair. The wind suddenly lifted the screen curtain of the sedan, and he saw an extremely fat girl inside, her face covered with dark spots. She was young. Meng Hao's jaw dropped.

If he hadn't recognized the serving girl next to her, he would never have believed that the young woman was actually Miss Sun.

The sedan chair disappeared into the distance, and Meng Hao continued walking, feeling a bit regretful.

"I just destroyed the image of my dream lover..." he said, shaking his head. "Well, the sages were right: avert the gaze from inappropriateness. I shouldn't have looked, shouldn't have looked." A look of pity appeared on his face as he walked away.

Around noon, Meng Hao found himself staring blankly at a large house off in the distance. It was worn-out and dilapidated and there were clearly people living inside. He could hear noise drifting out from inside. It sounded like the occupants were arguing.

This was Meng Hao's ancestral residence. Years ago, he had been destitute, and was forced to sell it. Inside that house were many beautiful and happy memories from the past, as well as the bitter, yet empowering memories from the time after his parents went missing.

Image after image appeared in Meng Hao's mind. He stood there until dusk began to fall.

Silently, he approached the door, raised his hand, and knocked.

The knock silenced the din of argument that had continued unceasingly throughout the afternoon. After a moment the door opened. A middle-aged man stood there, frowning. His face was covered with lines from a lifetime of hardships.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Uncle Li...?" said Meng Hao quietly, looking at the man in front of him.

“You...” the middle-aged man stared in surprise. He looked closely at Meng Hao, and then a look of disbelief filled his eyes. “Meng Hao? You... Where have you been? Come in!” With a look of pleasant surprise, the man dragged Meng Hao into the house.

“Wife, come see who it is!”

A middle-aged woman sat inside, tears in her eyes. When she heard her husband’s words, and saw Meng Hao, she gaped for a moment, then rose to her feet, her eyes beaming with joy.

“It really is Meng Hao...” said the man.

“Child, everyone said you just up and left that year. Let Auntie have a look at you.” She stood in front of him, looking him up and down, her eyes filled with happiness. She seemed to have forgotten the afternoon spent arguing. “I haven’t seen you for years. You’ve grown taller, but, ai, you’re so skinny. You must have endured a lot over the years.

“Here, have a seat. Auntie will cook a few dishes for you. You just got back, stay a while. You may have sold this place to your Uncle Li, but it’s still your home.” She gave a kind, happy smile to Meng Hao, then glared at the man and went into the kitchen.

Soon, the table was filled with food. Looking at the couple in front of him, and the kindness in their eyes, it reminded him of the times after his parents had gone missing. Without the help of Uncle and Aunt Li, things would have been much more difficult for him.

“The harvests haven’t been good these years,” said Aunt Li, serving some food to Meng Hao. “We gave our house to our son so that he could get married. Since this place was empty, we moved here.” She gave him a kind look. “Where have you been all these years? We looked all over for you, but were never able to find you.”

Meng Hao listened to them talk and felt their kindness in his heart. He told them a somewhat vague story of traveling to a different part of the country to study. After the meal was finished, he gave the couple a deep bow.

“Uncle Li, Aunt Li, I would like to repurchase my ancestral home. After all, my mother and father left it for me. Here are some pieces of silver. You two can continue living here and help take care of the place.” He pulled out some pieces of silver from within his robe and put them down.

“This...” Uncle Li hesitated, looking at his wife. Aunt Li said nothing, but after a moment passed, nodded.

“You’re right,” she said resolutely. “This house is yours, left to you by your father and mother. Your Uncle Li and I are getting old, so as you suggest, we will stay here. But we don’t need the silver. We looked after you as you grew up. You’re like our own child! How could we take your money?” She put the silver pieces back into Meng Hao’s hand.

Meng Hao didn’t say anything, instead clasping his hands and bowing deeply to them once again.

He didn’t stay for the night. Instead, he gathered together some things from the house that contained memories, then made his farewells and slipped off into the darkness of the night. He didn’t take the silver with him. He left it on the bed.

Later, he sat cross-legged on a bed in an inn, looking out at the night sky. He sighed.

“I’m no longer part of the mortal world, and yet, it’s hard to sever all the ties.” He closed his eyes. “Well, if they can’t be severed, then I shall just let them remain.”

At dawn the next morning, Meng Hao found the Wang Family carpenter shop. There, he saw an aged Uncle Wang, his face full of wrinkles, sitting in the shop staring at nothing. In front of him was a wood carving that looked just like Wang Youcai. Uncle Wang’s face seemed to be filled with an indelible sorrow.

Meng Hao thought for a moment. He wasn’t sure whether or not Wang Youcai was dead. After being promoted to the Inner Sect, he had sought out Little Tiger, then gone to inspect the area where Wang Youcai had fallen off the cliff. He hadn’t been able to find any clues regarding what had happened.

With a sigh, Meng Hao walked into the carpenter shop.

Sensing that someone had arrived, Uncle Wang lifted his head. When he saw Meng Hao, he stared in surprise. Rubbing his eyes, he stood up, trembling.

“You... You’re... Meng Hao?”

“Uncle Wang, it’s me.” Meng Hao reached out to support the old man.

“Where is Youcai?” he asked. It seemed he hadn’t forgotten the details about what happened that year. Looking at Meng Hao, he suddenly seemed excited. “You both went missing at the same time that year. Where is he...?”

“Youcai wasn’t able to return, so he asked me to send a message for him,” said Meng Hao with a smile. “He’ll be back in a few years. You can rest at ease, sir. Youcai is living very well.” He helped Uncle Wang into his chair, then sat with him for a while chatting. He told him that they had gone off to study, and Youcai was so talented that he wanted to continue studying for some time before returning.

Tears of excitement rolled down Uncle Wang’s face. He listened to Meng Hao’s story, nodding, and it seemed as if some of the wrinkles on his face disappeared. Meng Hao continued to tell some interesting anecdotes, and the old man smiled.

“That kid was always smart. He never wanted to study carpentry from me. He would spend all day thinking about other things. Good, good. If he can go out to study, it’s a good thing.” Uncle Wang’s smile widened. Around noon, Meng Hao left, escorted to the door personally by Uncle Wang.

Little Tiger and Fatty weren’t from Yunjie County, but rather the other two surrounding counties. Meng Hao wasn’t very familiar with Little Tiger, but felt confident that he could take care of himself. On the other hand, he definitely had to go pay a visit to Fatty’s family to let them know he was doing well.

Fatty was most likely in the Southern Domain. Meng Hao sighed

inwardly.

That afternoon, he went looking for Steward Zhou, but couldn't find him. After asking around, he learned that Steward Zhou had moved his household away about half a year ago. People said he'd moved to the capital city of the State of Zhao. Learning this, Meng Hao made no further inquiries, and left Yunjie County.

There were many memories here, but Meng Hao knew that as soon as he had entered the Reliance Sect, his path lay in the direction of the State of Zhao, and the Southern Domain.

He left in silence, taking with him only a few items which he stored in his bag of holding: some pots and bowls, and some bed quilts. The pots and bowls had been given to him by his father as a gift, and the bed quilts had been quilted by his mother. To Meng Hao, these things were priceless.

There were three counties below Mount Daqing. In addition to Yunjie County, there was Yunhai County and Yunkai County. Fatty's home was in Yunkai.

It was smaller than Yunjie, and although it was not as bustling, it was surrounded by vast tracts of land and was therefore quite a wealthy place. This was especially true of the handful of great families, who controlled sizeable properties and wealth.

Fatty's father was the famous Moneybags Li of Yunkai County. From what Fatty had told him in the past, his family employed several hundred workers, and you could spend an entire day walking through the family compound, which was filled with menservants and maidservants.

He had said his chamberpot was made of silver, his quilts purchased from the capital city of the State of Zhao, and that from childhood, maidservants would heat his bed for him before he slept. That arrangement had continued as he grew up, and he said he couldn't even remember how many maidservants he'd touched in his life. In any case, he had never lacked for want of anything, all the way down until the time his marriage had been arranged. His fiancée was an extremely beautiful young woman from a family of famous scholars in Yunkai. His father had

put a lot of thought, and money, into successfully arranging the matter.

As he thought back to Fatty's expression when he talked about it, Meng Hao smiled. He walked into Yunkai County.

Chapter 46: Three Long Spears

Meng Hao had been to Yunkai County a few times before. Usually it was when he needed to buy pens, ink, paper and inkstones. Perhaps because the excess of wealth in the village prompted a demand for scholarly embellishments, the price of writing supplies was cheaper than average.

Even though three years had passed, the place looked just like before. As Meng Hao walked down the streets, he couldn't help but notice that outside of many of the shops hung lanterns, upon which the character "Li" was written in sweeping calligraphy.

From what Fatty had said, his father was the richest person in Yunkai, and actually owned about half of the county. And it wasn't just land they owned, but business, all of which were marked with the character "Li."

After asking around, he determined the location of Fatty's house and headed in that direction. The sun was beginning to sink over the horizon, turning the sky dark and covering the land with a soft glow.

It didn't take long for him to reach the east end of Yunkai County, where he saw a massive estate, filled with a veritable forest of grand buildings. Above the main door, which was guarded by retainers, was a board inscribed with the words "Li Mansion." The lively sound of singing and dancing could be heard from within.

Meng Hao's body flashed, and he was inside.

The mansion was a large, surrounding an inner courtyard where singers and dancers were currently putting on a show. Meng Hao caught sight of an extremely fat, middle-aged man wearing a luxurious robe. He closely resembled Fatty; this was obviously his father. Sitting next to him was a young man whose face was covered with a prudent expression.

He seemed wildly arrogant, and wore expensive garments, yet his body looked a bit frail, as if he had worn himself out with too much wine and women. He held a wine cup in his hand, and a somewhat indecent expression shone in his eyes as he looked over the singers and dancers.

“Still not here yet?” said the young man, frowning. His tone of voice was both cold and bored.

“Any moment, any moment,” said Fatty’s father, looking extremely embarrassed, but forcing an obsequious smile onto his face. “Young Lord Zhao, please just wait a bit longer. My daughter-in-law tends to take things slowly.” Even as the words came out of his mouth, several maidservants appeared in the distance. Walking behind them was a young woman. She wore a long, gauzy garment, and her hair was put up with phoenix hairpins. Her appearance was pure and beautiful, and yet there was a look of fear on her face; as she approached she seemed to shiver as if she were cold.

“Father...” she said as she approached. She bowed in greeting.

“Xiang’er, this is the young Lord from the house of Zhao in Yunhai County,” said Fatty’s father softly. “Why don’t you toast him?” He looked at his daughter-in-law apologetically. Even though his son had been missing for years, she continued to wait for him to return, never complaining. She treated her father-in-law with utmost filial piety.

“Greetings, young Lord Zhao,” said the girl softly, lowering her head. She was afraid, but she knew that the family was not in a good position at the moment. She lifted up the wine pot and poured some wine into a cup, which she extended to him with both hands.

He looked at her, his eyes shining brightly. He swallowed hard. The girl was shockingly beautiful, and in his heart, he was already prepared to make some trouble. A lecherous smile appeared on his face. He accepted the wine up and then tried to grab her hand. The girl stepped back, frightened, causing the cup to tumble to the floor.

“How dare you!” shouted young Lord Zhao, his eyes blazing. He kicked over the table, sending wine and food scattering about. He pointed at Fatty’s father. “You listen to me, Li Dafu. My younger brother is back, and he’s an Immortal now. He wants your property, not your lives! I felt pity for you and spoke kindly of you to him, but then you humiliate me like this!?”

“Young Lord Zhao, this...” Fatty’s father hastily tried to speak.

“Shut the hell up! Let me tell you, this matter isn’t finished! If you know what’s good for you, you’ll have your daughter-in-law spend the night with me. If she pleases me, then I’ll say some more nice things about you to my younger brother....” He laughed coldly, his eyes fixed on the girl, whose face had grown pale white. A dirty look once again appeared on his face.

Fatty’s father’s face grew ashen. At first, the young man had only mentioned toasting, which he had agreed to. But this was excessive. He gritted his teeth. His son was missing, and he couldn’t even protect his own daughter-in-law. What was the point of living?

“Beat it!” he roared. “Get the hell out of here! Men, kick this man out! Even if the Li family goes bankrupt, I won’t tolerate insults from the house of Zhao!”

“How impressive,” laughed young Lord Zhao. He spun and left, his eyes filled with murder.

Watching the feast being cleared away, the young girl bit her lip, tears streaming down her face. She lowered her head and looked as if she were about to say something.

“Don’t worry about this matter,” said Fatty’s father calmly. “Law still exists in this world. Please, take the young miss back.” Servants appeared to escort the young woman away. Everything was quiet. Fatty’s father began to tremble. He staggered, suddenly seeming to grow older.

Then he shook his head and began to walk. Before long, he reached a building. He pushed the door open and walked in. It was a luxurious room, but seemed as if it would look better if everything weren’t covered with bite marks.

“Fugui, where are you?” murmured Fatty’s father as he sat down into a chair. “Why haven’t you returned...?” He looked even older than before. He gently rubbed at a bite mark on the table.

“He’s doing well,” said a voice, breaking the silence. Fatty’s father lifted his head, and his eyes filled with fear as he realized that somehow another

person was standing in the room, next to the window. He had no idea when or how he had come to be standing there.

He wore a long blue robe, and looked like a scholar. It was none other than Meng Hao.

“You...” Li Dafu stood up, looking alarmed. He took a few steps back.

“I’m Li Fugui’s friend from the Sect, Meng Hao, from Yunjie County.” Meng Hao turned. His eyes moved from some bite marks on the windowsill to rest on Li Dafu.

“Meng Hao!” said Li Dafu, shocked. He recognized the name. When he had checked into the disappearance of his son all those years ago, he’d learned that three other boys had gone missing at the same time. One of them was named Meng Hao.

“Fugui, he...” Li Dafu’s body began to tremble. Inside, he felt hesitation.

“He’s not in the State of Zhao at the moment, but I think he’ll be able to return before too long.” Meng Hao walked forward and sat down in a chair. “I saw what happened in the courtyard just now,” he said coolly. “I’ll stay here for a few days to take care of the matter.” He took a piece of paper out and placed it down onto the table. “Please forge me three spears according to these specifications. One iron, one silver, and one gold spear.” With that, he closed his eyes.

Li Dafu hesitated, but then nodded his head. Regardless of how unbelievable the situation might seem, he would rather believe what Meng Hao had just said. Without a word, he picked up the paper and hurried off.

As for young Lord Zhao, he left the Li household, and Yunkai County, his face grim. Accompanied by his retainers, he made his way back to Yunhai County in the darkness of night, gnashing his teeth. As he walked, he slapped himself hard in the face, leaving behind a clear palm print. Soon, he arrived at a large courtyard, and the expression on his face suddenly turned to one of respect, even awe. His voice low, he spoke.

“Little brother, are you awake?”

“What’s the matter!?” said a cold voice. The voice was a bit shrill, as if its owner was a boy just beginning to go through puberty.

“Not only does the house of Li refuse to listen to your suggestions, they also humiliated me. They even slapped me.” Young Lord Zhao tried to put on his most humiliated expression.

The door slowly opened, and a young man walked out. He appeared to be about twelve or thirteen, and wore a richly embroidered gown. He had finely chiseled features and looked almost beautiful. Were Meng Hao here, this young man would instantly begin to act like a toady. He was one of the disciples saved by Grand Elder Ouyang the day the Reliance Sect was disbanded. He was Meng Hao’s servant, Zhao Hai.

He had the same idea as Fatty, to become a great landowner. With Fatty gone, he had returned to this area and began plundering the properties of the local rich families. He had actually begun to plan how to deal with Li Dafu back when he was still in the Reliance Sect. Unfortunately, after returning, he’d learned that the Li family forbade its members from revealing information about family assets.

“You good-for-nothing fool,” said Zhao Hai with a cold snort. “Do you really think I’m as stupid as you? The angle of that palm print is all wrong. You obviously hit yourself.” An expression of disgust appeared on his face. But, this person was his older brother. He frowned. “Never mind. I’m about to make a breakthrough in my Cultivation base. In seven days, I’ll go with you to the house of Li.” He turned and went back into the room, slamming the door behind him. Young Lord Zhao looked pleased. His heart burned as he imagined the young girl’s plaintive cries coming from underneath him, seven days from now.

Seven days passed. Zhao Hai walked out of the house of Li in Yunhai County, his hands clasped behind his back, followed by young Lord Zhao. They brought a group of family retainers with them. Their eyes filled with killing intent as they headed straight for Yunkai County.

In Yunkai County, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in Fatty’s room, meditating in silence. Around noon-time, a light knock could be heard on

the door. Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes to see Li Dafu entering the room. Behind him were ten family retainers. Three groups of three men each carried a spear, one iron, one silver, and one gold.

Networks of fine lines were carved onto their surfaces, making them appear both primitive and luxurious at the same time. Meng Hao raised his hand, and the iron spear flew through the air toward him. Li Dafu and his servants gaped in astonishment and shock.

The iron spear was extremely heavy; to see Meng Hao snatch it from such a distance frightened them.

Li Dafu's body shook, and his eyes shone. Before, he had surmised that Meng Hao was not an ordinary person. Despite only half trusting him, he had still complied with the request to craft the three spears. But now, he thoroughly believed his previous words. This person was clearly not ordinary.

Meng Hao nodded, retrieving the silver and gold spears. He tested them out, then deposited them into his bag of holding with the flick of a sleeve. When this happened, flopping sounds sounded out as the servants dropped to their knees and bowed to him, their expressions filled with shock.

Chapter 47: Another Encounter with Shangguan Xiu

“An Immortal!”

Li Dafu seemed to be frozen in place, trembling violently. He looked as if he, too, might drop to his knees. Before, he had assumed this person was extraordinary in some way, but had never imagined that he could be an immortal. Then he suddenly became even more excited as he remembered the man had said that his son was a friend from his Sect.

“Don’t tell me... Don’t tell me that useless kid is now an Immortal!?”

He was about to ask when Meng Hao lifted his head and looked out the window. The sound of a commotion drifted in from outside, then a series of cracks as the main gate was broken open.

“Li Dafu, get the hell out here! My younger brother is an Immortal, and he’s here to visit you. Come out here and bow to him!”

Li Dafu looked up. Meng Hao stood and walked toward the door. Li Dafu followed hurriedly, and they soon arrived in the outer courtyard of the mansion. Pieces of the door lay scattered about everywhere, along with a multitude of moaning family retainers. The cocky young Lord stood there, and behind him, a young man, one hand held behind his back, the other held up in front of him. Encircling his hand was a finger-sized Flame Serpent.

The young man looked proud and unyielding, and his Flame Serpent caused the surrounding onlookers to slowly move away from him, gasping with fear and astonishment.

“Kid brother, this is Li Dafu,” said the young Lord Zhao, ignoring Meng Hao, who stood behind him.

“So you are... huh?” Zhao Hai lifted his chin as he started to speak, then suddenly caught sight of Meng Hao. His body immediately began to shake, and his eyes filled with disbelief. The Flame Serpent instantly disappeared, and the blood drained from his horrified face. Unconsciously, as by

instinct, an ingratiating look appeared on his face.

“Li Dafu,” shouted the swaggering young Lord Zhao, clearly unaware of Zhao Hai’s change in expression, “you dare to not kneel before my brother? Let me tell you, he’s an Immortal! Do you understand what that means? He could exterminate your whole family with a wave of his hand!

“You still haven’t brought the girl out? Prepare a good room immediately. If she takes care of me well, and I’m happy, then maybe if you beg, I can provide you with an heir. Otherwise, your name will die out!” The more he spoke, the more excited he became. Behind him, however, Zhao Hai’s face was deathly pale. He trembled as he looked at Meng Hao, his head spinning. And then his brother’s words hit his ears, and his heart filled with dread.

“If you don’t,” continued the young Lord, “then, heh heh, you’re dead, along with that scholar standing next to you... Hey, who’s he? Your adopted son? You dare to stare at me? Are you looking to die? My brother is an Immortal...” Before he even finished speaking, his words reached Zhao Hai’s ears like a thunderclap, causing him to leap into the air. Fury filling his eyes, he slapped his older brother across the face.

“Shut the hell up!!” he screamed, sounding as if he was about to weep. He knew Meng Hao too well. He remembered his status when he was in the Inner Sect, his victory over Wang Tengfei. Nobody in the Outer Sect was ignorant of Meng Hao, nor his sixth-level Cultivation base. Meng Hao was like a lofty mountain that could crush Zhao Hai to death with little effort.

Even as his brother cried out in pain, Zhao Hai dropped to his knees, body quivering. “Servant Zhao Hai extends greetings... greetings to Elder Brother Meng...”

His brother stood next to him, gaping in surprise. Covering his face with a hand, he blurted, “Brother, what did you call him? Elder Brother Meng? Hahaha! So he’s family! Ah, the girl must have caught his fancy too. Well, just give Meng...”

“Shut up!!” screamed Zhao Hai. He looked as if he were so scared he

would drop dead. His body shook violently as his mind replayed all the things he'd heard about Meng Hao from the Outer Sect disciples. Utterly discomfited, he leaped to his feet and slapped his brother in the face again.

Li Dafu watched on in amazement. He sucked in a breath, then looked numbly at Meng Hao. He had guessed that Meng Hao was an Immortal, but he'd never imagined that upon seeing him, the powerful Immortal from the house of Zhao would be so terrified that he would break out trembling.

It wasn't just him. The surrounding servants all watched on in a daze, their eyes filling with veneration as they looked at Meng Hao.

"Elder Brother Meng..." said Zhao Hai, kneeling again, his eyes filled with intense fear.

His face somber, Meng Hao looked at Zhao Hai coldly, wordlessly.

Zhao Hai's heart thumped, and he clenched his jaw. He caught sight of his older brother standing next to him, and his eyes filled with rage. He didn't dare to complain to Meng Hao, so he decided to vent his anger on his brother.

He waved his right hand, and once again the finger-sized Flame Serpent appeared. It slammed into the young Lord Zhao, who immediately began to scream shrilly. He fell to the ground, rolling back and forth. Within moments, he had turned into a twitching, charred corpse.

"I beg Elder Brother Meng to spare my life," said Zhao Hai, ignoring his brother, kneeling before Meng Hao and kowtowing over and over again.

"It seems you are reluctant to leave the mortal world behind," said Meng Hao coolly. "Therefore, from today on, you can set your mind at rest, and live as a mortal. He lifted a finger, and instantly, Zhao Hai's face went pale and he spat out a mouthful of blood. His dantian shattered, and his second-level Cultivation base was destroyed. He was no longer a Cultivator, but a mortal.

He staggered up, saluting Meng Hao with clasped hands. Then he turned

and left in anguish, supported by his men. He gradually disappeared into the distance.

“I didn’t discipline him well enough,” said Meng Hao, not watching as Zhao Hai left. “He was my servant who ran away from the Sect. He caused trouble for you, Uncle Li.” He bowed to Li Dafu with cupped fists.

“No harm was done, all is well,” said Li Dafu, shaking his head. “My thanks to you, Immortal.” He bent at the waist in a bow. His head was still spinning as he thought about the Immortal of the house of Zhao being Meng Hao’s servant.

“No need for that, Uncle Li,” smiled Meng Hao. “Fatty... Li Fugui is my closest friend in the Sect. I came here in his place to visit, so of course I would not turn a blind eye to a situation such as this.” He took a step back, cupping his fists again in salute. “I shall take my leave.” He departed in a flash. Within a few steps, he was gone, leaving Li Dafu looking a bit melancholy. He was thinking of his son. Then, he broke out in another smile, his eyes filling with pride and anticipation.

“My son has done well. He’s an Immortal! I will go burn some incense in the ancestral hall. This matter has brought glory to our family and ancestors.”

Meng Hao left Yunkai County. It was afternoon now, and his robe rippled in the autumn wind. The mountain wind grew stronger and stronger as he approached Mount Daqing.

He stood on the same place on the mountaintop where he had stood in a daze three years before. Emotion filled his face. Three years had passed so quickly. His face was no longer young and naive. He had matured, but Mount Daqing was the same as always. It would never change, nor would the great river which flowed ceaselessly beneath it.

Looking down at the river, Meng Hao thought of the gourd bottle he had thrown into it that year. He thought about how he had encountered Elder Sister Xu, Fatty, Wang Youcai and Little Tiger.

Silently, he leaped into the air and onto a flying sword. He flew down the mountain to the fissure in the cliff. He entered.

It was exactly the same as it had been before. Meng Hao stood inside, looking around. That year, Elder Sister Xu had been at the seventh level of Qi Condensation. And now, he was a Cultivator of the seventh level. It was as if the three years had been a giant circle, with this as the starting point, and the ending point.

“But if the three years really were a circle, then perhaps returning here means that I’ve reached a new starting point.... It’s like the sages said, if you don’t take a first step, you will never know which direction the road leads.” He closed his eyes for a while, then opened them.

“I’ve already taken my first new steps. That year, I lacked money, and now I lack Spirit Stones. It doesn’t seem much has changed.” Meng Hao shook his head, thinking about the scant amount of Spirit Stones in his bag of holding. He couldn’t help but feel a bit of pain as he turned and left the cave. Atop his flying sword, he shot down in the direction of the river.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed, and he lifted up his head. Up on Mount Daqing, in the same position he had just been standing in, was a man wearing a golden-colored robe. He gazed down coldly at Meng Hao.

“So, you did come back here,” he said in a sinister voice which seemed to make the setting sun grow even darker, leaving behind only his eyes, filled with murder and greed.

It was Shangguan Xiu!

The day the Sect had been dissolved, he was the first person to flee. After a few days had passed, he reappeared. After some asking around, he learned about the dissolution of the Sect, as well as how Patriarch Reliance had cast terror into the hearts of the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao. So, covering his tracks, he left, deciding that it was time to go harvest some medicinal herbs that he had planted in secret some time ago.

On the way, however, he had passed Mount Daqing, which caused him to think about the time he had investigated Meng Hao. He knew that this was where Xu Qing had found him, so he decided to stick around for a few days in the hopes of encountering him.

Killing intent shone in Meng Hao's eyes. He was currently at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, so he was able to detect the levels of other Cultivators. Shangguan Xiu was at the ninth level. Although his Cultivation base was not complete, it was close. With luck, he would soon be able to successfully establish his Foundation, which would make him one of the most powerful experts in the State of Zhao.

Meng Hao knew that he was no match for him, even if he had a lot of magical items on hand. Right now, though, his bag of holding had not been replenished, and he had almost no Spirit Stones. It was not a good time to fight.

Without a word, he shot off into the distance, his body turning into a blur. As he sped off, Shangguan Xiu gave off a cold laugh. Within the Sect, he had feared Grand Elder Ouyang, and hadn't dared to make a move against an Inner Sect disciple. But that was in the past. His desire to kill Meng Hao and take his treasures burned brightly. His body flashed, and a talisman appeared in front of him. It picked him up, and he shot in pursuit of Meng Hao.

"This time, there's no special promotion training! How can you escape my hands?!" A sinister smile covered Shangguan Xiu's face. He was determined to succeed!

Chapter 48: Eccentric Song and Wu Dingqiu

Thunder rolled out in the evening sky. Rosy clouds drifted about, and the autumn wind rustled, picking up the fallen leaves and sending them floating. It should have been a beautiful, rainy autumn evening, but the peacefulness was interrupted by two figures who occasionally dropped to the ground, but then immediately shot back up into the air. They soared along, engaged in a life-and-death pursuit.

Meng Hao was in front, his eyes glistening. After reaching the seventh level of Qi Condensation, he could maintain top speed on his flying sword for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn. At that rate, he could not shake off Shangguan Xiu.

After some time passed, he was forced to drop to the ground, run as fast as possible for a while, and then resume gliding.

Shangguan Xiu pursued him doggedly. He knew that he couldn't let him escape; if he did, Meng Hao could easily hide somewhere in the massive State of Zhao, and that would be very troublesome.

At the moment, he was extremely confident. A critical juncture had arrived. He knew that Meng Hao possessed some treasured item. He wasn't exactly sure what it did, but he was determined to acquire it.

"Meng Hao, you can't escape me! My aim has always been the Southern Domain. The only reason I haven't ascended to the Foundation Establishment stage yet is because I didn't want to. You're like an ant to me! You will be my stepping stone into Foundation Establishment!" Shangguan Xiu was of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Even though he was very close to breaking through to the Foundation Establishment stage, his level of power was still far from that level. That having been said, even though Meng Hao was in the same stage as him, their Cultivation bases were still two levels apart. This meant that not only was Shangguan Xiu faster, but because of his status as an Elder in the Reliance Sect, he'd had access to higher level magical items.

The talisman whistled through the air, propelling him forward with extraordinary power. He flicked his wide sleeve, snapping a jade slip. A green mist shot out, which coagulated into a green bottle, about half the height of an average person. It shot toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered and he slapped his bag of holding. Ten flying swords appeared, shooting toward the magical bottle. As soon as they collided, the ten flying swords exploded into pieces, which mushroomed out in all directions. The bottle shattered, but Shangguan Xiu simply increased his speed and leaped over the cloud, intent on decreasing the distance between him and Meng Hao.

At that moment, Meng Hao suddenly turned, his hands flickering in incantation patterns. Wind Blades appeared, three of them. However, they didn't shoot toward Shangguan Xiu, but instead flew in circular patterns, faster and faster, creating a suction force which pulled in the shattered remnants of his flying swords. Soon, they had formed a spinning vortex.

A booming sound rang out, but Meng Hao didn't look back. The vortex behind Shangguan Xiu suddenly exploded, sending shrapnel shooting out. Shangguan Xiu was knocked forward, shredding much of his clothing. His eyes burned with fury.

"So you've reached the seventh level of Qi Condensation!" Shangguan Xiu glared as Meng Hao sped off into the distance. He continued his pursuit, albeit more cautiously. He knew that Meng Hao was incredibly crafty, and could not be underestimated. He must use all his power.

When he thought about the technique Meng Hao had just used, gathering the fragmented pieces of the swords together, Shangguan Xiu was a bit taken aback. If Meng Hao's Cultivation base were higher, then the attack just now, while it might not have killed him, would have seriously injured him.

"He's so young, yet so sinister. Exploding the swords was just a diversion. Dammit!" He increased his speed, turning into a ray of light as he pursued Meng Hao.

Two people shot through the evening as the sky grew dark. The bright

moon looked down, its gaze illuminating them.

Meng Hao's face was grim. He consumed some Demonic cores. Even though the North Sea had shown him the Dao, and he had broken through to the next level, his current situation did not bode well. He was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, but had no way to lose his pursuer. He was in somewhat of a crisis.

"There will come a day when I will slay this man!" thought Meng Hao. As he considered the inexplicable enmity between them, he came to the realisation that it was all because of his opponent's greed. Over and over again. It was extremely annoying.

Looking back at Shangguan Xiu, Meng Hao gritted his teeth. As his flying sword sputtered out of power, he leaped to the ground, racing toward the wild mountains. He was heading, not toward the Reliance Sect, but rather the east of Mount Daqing, where a chain of mountains rose and fell off toward the flatlands and the capital city of the State of Zhao.

The mountains here were numerous, even more so than the regions around the Reliance Sect. This mountain chain was the largest in the State of Zhao, and had come to be known as the State Shield Mountain range. From a distance, you couldn't see past them, and in the night, they rose up like the undulating spine of a slumbering dragon, emanating a lofty air.

Meng Hao lowered his head, speeding deep into the State Shield Mountains. This was not the first time he had fled for his life in the past three years. From his experience that year on the black mountain, Meng Hao knew how to seize opportunities. He flew as fast as he could, heading deeper and deeper into the mountains.

Shangguan Xiu did not slow in his pursuit. No matter where Meng Hao went, he would follow. His mind was set; he would kill Meng Hao and take his treasures. And yet he knew he didn't have much time. The medicinal herb that he had planted was ripe and ready to be harvested. If he was too slow, it would wither, which would wreck his future plans.

In his estimation, it should take more than one or two days to take care of Meng Hao. That much of a delay was acceptable. So without hesitation,

he continued into the barren mountains in pursuit.

About one thousand kilometers away from the point where Meng Hao and Shangguan Xiu entered the State of Zhao's State Shield Mountains, there arose a lofty mountain.

The mountain's peak pierced the clouds, and was visible from a vast distance away. Everything from half-way up the mountain all the way to its peak was covered with white snow. It was huge, much bigger than any of the surrounding mountains, and its very top seemed to emanate rays of light that covered the mountain like flowing water.

Next to this mountain was another mountain, whose top appeared to have been sliced off, forming a round, plateau-like platform. Assembled on the platform were nearly a hundred Cultivators wearing long, white robes.

They were young, the youngest of the group being eleven or twelve years old, the oldest, seventeen or eighteen. There were boys and girls, and all of them wore expressions of keen anticipation. Some of them seemed to be keeping their Cultivation base concealed, and their faces looked proud and unyielding.

Some of the group were at the seventh or eighth level of Qi Condensation, and a few were even at the ninth. The weakest were at the fifth or sixth levels. There was no Sect in the State of Zhao who had disciples like this. Clearly, whoever had gathered this group of youths was a major Sect from the Southern Domain.

Their clothing was all uniform, and they radiated an imposing air, as if they had the power to affect everything around them. Some of them had outstanding latent talent, and all of them were filled with vigor. Clearly, they belonged in the Cultivation world.

"These are some of my Outer Sect disciples," said a voice with a complacent laugh. "What do you think, Eccentric Song?" At the front of the group, near the edge of the platform, two old men sat cross-legged, a chessboard spread out between them. The person who had laughed was one of these old men. He had white hair, wore a white robe, and had the

demeanor of a transcendent being.

His eyes flashed like lightning and were filled with pride. He continued to laugh.

Sitting across from him was Eccentric Song, wearing a long black robe that seemed to shimmer with iridescence. His long gray hair hung in disarray, and he wore an enigmatic smile on his face.

“Excellent, excellent. Your Violet Fate Sect is definitely worthy to be called one of the five Great Sects of the Southern Domain. There are clearly some promising subjects among your Outer Sect Disciples, Wu Dingqiu.” Eccentric Song smiled, and a cold wind seemed to spring up. The onlooking disciples’ minds seemed to shiver.

“Very well, let us carry out our wager,” said the white-robed man with a smile, his eyes flashing. His hand made a snatching motion, and suddenly a large stone appeared, about the size of a human head. It slammed down onto the ground next to him.

It was dark and opaque, and yet a black glow could be seen flickering inside it. A multitude of flickering twinkles could be seen within, as if it were composed of a vast number of gems.

“This is what I’m putting up, a Heaven Crystal!” The white-robed man’s eyes sparkled as he looked at Eccentric Song.

“No problem,” said Eccentric Song, flicking his sleeve. “This is the Star Fragment you’ve had your eye on.” A large lump of iron appeared, about the size of a fist. It emanated a black glow, as if it could swallow up everything in sight. It was clearly anything but ordinary. “See the flag on the peak of the mountain? If your disciples can topple that flag, then you win. But, if your Violet Fate Sect disciples aren’t skilled enough to ascend the mountain, then your Heaven Crystal is mine.” He laughed contentedly.

“Fear not,” said the white-robed man with a confident sneer. “My disciples can definitely snap your paltry flagpole. They will also clear the mountain of all its treasures and slay all the Demonic beasts you’ve raised. Don’t go back on your word when that happens!”

“I have roamed heaven and earth for four hundred years and have never gone back on my word. Yes, I have filled this mountain with many treasures and Spirit Stones, as well as numerous unique Spirit beasts that I have carefully raised. But mark my words, once the mountain is opened, anyone under the Foundation Establishment stage can enter, for seven days. This includes your Violet Fate Sect disciples, as well as disciples of any other Sect. Anyone!

“Anyone with skill can acquire the treasures. Even if someone comes along who can clear them all out, I won’t even so much as frown, let alone go back on my word. If I do, then I’m not surnamed Song!” Eccentric Song spoke all these words with head held high, looking unyielding, his voice decisive.

“However, anyone without skill who does not acquire treasures, and cannot ascend to the top of the mountain, will become food for my Spirit beasts. This is simply their destiny.” Having said this, his smile grew even colder, and his eyes filled with a sneer.

“All of my Violet Fate Sect disciples are outstanding among their peers,” said Wu Dingqiu with a glare, his voice booming out. “Clearing out your mountain will be as easy for them as turning over a hand.”

“For a hundred kilometres surrounding my treasure mountain, Spirit Beasts roam freely. I’ve fertilized the land with soil from the bottom of the Eastern Sea, which hasn’t seen the light of day for ten thousand years. I even transported the top of Mount Tian Shan from the Southern Domain to be this mountain’s highest peak, spending an entire sixty-year cycle refining it and assimilating it into mountain. There is nothing like it in the world. Each Spirit beast here is an exquisite specimen personally acquired by myself. They are fiendish and unusual, Mutated beasts that I painstakingly collected from everywhere under heaven! I think the hundred or so disciples you have brought are not enough food for my Spirit beasts!” Eccentric Song glared, slowly rubbing his beard.

Chapter 49: Mountain of Trial by Fire

“My Violet Fate Sect is one of the great sects of the Southern Domain. These may be just Outer Sect disciples, but even to enter the Sect, each and every one of them passed nine difficult tests. Every month, they immerse their bodies in a Spirit Spring. They possess inexhaustible amounts of heavenly materials and earthly treasures. All of them have extraordinary latent talent, rarely seen in any Sect.

“These disciples could flatten your crappy mountain with the wave of a hand. As for your Demonic creatures, they aren’t even fit to be eaten by my disciples. They’re not Mutated beasts they’re Mutt beasts!” Wu Dingqiu glared with wide eyes. The disciples behind him lowered their heads in embarrassment, glancing at Eccentric Song.

Eccentric Song stared for a moment, surprised. He flicked his sleeve and was about to say something when Wu Dingqiu suddenly leaped up and turned to face his disciples.

“Violet Fate Sect Disciples!” he roared. “This might be your first time to venture outside of the Sect, but this mountain, where life and death is predestined, is a promotion training ground for the Inner Sect. Anyone who steps onto the mountain and reaches the half-way point shall be remembered. Anyone who reaches the mountain top, even more so. And whoever manages to snap that crappy flagpole will be my personal disciple, and receive immediate promotion into the Violet Fate Inner Sect! What are you gaping for?! Get moving!”

Upon hearing this, the faces of the white-robed disciples filled with inspiration and their eyes shined. This was their first time outside of the Sect. Some thirsted to become a member of the Inner Sect, others desired to acquire treasures. According to the rumors they had heard in the Sect, vast amounts of Spirit Stones, medicinal pills, and magical items were hidden in this State of Zhao treasure mountain.

Nearly a hundred bodies flashed toward the mountain, a shocking sight.

The peak of the mountain was extremely high, and the mountain itself

was surrounded by forest.

Almost immediately, thunderous noises arose from within the trees. The roars of the wild beasts shattered the quietness of the still night.

Two hours passed in which miserable shrieks continuously rang out from Demon Beast Forest, especially the border regions. Suddenly, seven or eight Violet Fate Sect disciples fled out from the forest, their faces filled with fear. They were being pursued by three mighty beasts who had the heads of dragons and the bodies of tigers. The ground shook beneath their feet as they charged forth.

The life force of these three beasts seemed boundless, their might extraordinary. Their fur was long and thick, causing them to look completely different from the average Demonic beast, savage and fierce to the extreme. When they breathed, their Qi transformed into Mist Serpents which coiled around their bodies, leaving the inexperienced, novice disciples frightened to death. Their faces paled, and they ran away at top speed.

Once they stepped foot outside the trees, the Demonic beasts ceased their pursuit. They glared viciously at the seven or eight disciples, then turned and disappeared back into the forest.

On the flat plateau, Eccentric Song laughed heartily. "Look, Wu Dingqiu, these are the Spirit beasts I have raised. What do you think? Even if your disciples grew up inside a Spirit Spring, it wouldn't do any good. Forget about the even more powerful Spirit Beasts on the treasure mountain, your Violet Fate Sect disciples can't even get past the Spirit Beast Forest!"

Wu Dingqiu sat there in his white robe, an unpleasant look on his face. He stared angrily at the seven or eight Cultivators. And yet, his tone of voice was as arrogant as always as he calmly said: "Those disciples are merely at the fifth or sixth level of Qi Condensation. The truly Chosen in my Sect are all still in the forest. It won't be long before they step foot onto your crappy mountain, then they will clear out all the junk you have hidden there!"

Time passed by, another two hours...

So far, no one had been able to get past the Demonic Beast Forest to step foot onto the mountain itself. Currently, miserable shrieks and wails drifted out from the trees, and before long, a commotion broke out at the edge of the forest as ten or more Violet Fate Sect disciples fled out in terror. Dread filled their faces, and some of them were injured. This was their first time outside of the Sect, and they were like flowers grown indoors who had never faced wind and rain. They were being pursued by a group of five howling Demonic beasts; one was a fierce, pitch-black tiger. Another was a giant peacock, nearly two meters tall. The rest were hard to identify, but were clearly out of the ordinary.

On the plateau, Eccentric Song once again let out a complacent laugh. He appeared to be in very high spirits. He grew even happier when he saw Wu Dingqiu's increasingly somber face.

"Wu Dingqiu, are these really the most outstanding disciples in your Violet Fate Sect? It seems that being raised inside a Spirit Spring really doesn't cut it. I'm afraid that even if they ate meals made from heavenly materials and earthly treasures, it still wouldn't do them any good. My treasure mountain is filled with unusual items rarely seen in the Southern Domain. I've spent all my energy in the past years on this project. After years of allowing my creatures to grow in strength, my mountain is ready. I've been waiting for quite some time for your Violet Fate Sect to come for this trial by fire."

Wu Dingqiu's face grew so grim that it seemed it might explode at any moment, like a volcano. In a stiff voice, he said, "It's just a crappy mountain, nothing worth bragging about. I could level the whole thing with the wave of a hand. All the disciples that have come back out are useless. The true Chosen ones are..." Even as the words came out of his mouth, his eyes suddenly widened. A handful of disciples had just come running out of the edge of the Demonic Forest. He leaped to his feet. With a roar, he said, "Get back in there! If anyone dares to run away, I shall expel you from the Sect!"

His roar reverberated across the land, but not very far. He limited it to a radius of about one hundred kilometers. When they heard it, the disciples

who had just fled out of the forest grew pale and began to tremble. They didn't dare to flee. Gritting their teeth, they turned and headed back. The Demonic beasts that had been pursuing them were also frightened, and dared not attack.

As for the twenty or more disciples who had already fled the Demonic Forest, their faces grew even paler, and they hesitated. They weren't sure if they should go back in or not.

"Be it the Violet Fate Sect's disciples, or another Sect's disciple, during these seven days, anyone can enter my Spirit Beast Forest," said Eccentric Song with a hearty laugh. "Anyone with the skill to step foot on my treasure mountain can have the chance to take away the treasures. I will neither stop them, nor even frown. Even the flag on the mountain peak is fair game. There I have placed a bag of the Cosmos, which can hold mountains and rivers inside.

Upon hearing his laughter, Wu Dingqiu's face grew more unsightly. He was beginning to feel that this Eccentric Song was too spiteful. He had filled the mountain with treasures, and seemed to have complete confidence that they wouldn't be touched. Wu Dingqiu flicked his sleeve and made to leave. He had already suffered too much humiliation, and would not stand for any more. But before he could go, Eccentric Song stood and blocked his way.

"Fellow Daoist Wu, we had an arrangement. Before we finish our game of chess, neither of us may leave. You're an Elder from one of the Great Sects of the Southern Domain. You're not going to go back on your word, are you?" As he laughed, his beard floated up a bit. His face was filled with utter pride, and it seemed he had no intention of letting Wu Dingqiu leave.

At that moment, Meng Hao was several thousand kilometres away, flying quickly through the mountain forest. Around him, autumn leaves floated in the air, and behind him, Shangguan Xiu was in hot pursuit, killing intent radiating out from him.

"This State Shield Mountain range goes on forever, Meng Hao," said Shangguan Xiu, his voice sinister. "Its depths are filled with miasma!

Going in this direction is the same as picking the road to death!”

“Pipe down,” said Meng Hao coldly. He frowned. It was the first thing he had said this entire time. He was really getting annoyed with Shangguan Xiu. As far as he was concerned, it was fine if he wanted to chase him, but the ceaseless chatter was unnecessary.

Shangguan Xiu’s eyes glittered and he lifted up his hands in front of him, then slapped them together.

Meng Hao suddenly felt a stab of pain in his chest that coincided with the slapping sound. It felt as if a sharp sword were slicing through into his heart. His face filled with pain and he coughed up a spray of blood.

“You finally speak, whelp! You fell for my trick! That was a special magic from my family that is designed to damage the heart and blood vessels.” With a sinister smile, he increased his speed. He lifted his right hand, and a five-colored pearl appeared. He flung it forward, and it shot toward Meng Hao. Before it reached him, it suddenly exploded, transforming into several five-colored streams of mist which then merged into the shape of a hideous evil spirit. It howled as it pounced toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked back with a grim expression. Having no time even to spit the blood from his mouth, his hands flickered in incantation gestures, and his body sped forward with increased speed. As the five-colored Mist Spirit approached, a head-sized Water Globe formed in his left hand. From his right had emerged a roaring Flame Python ten meters in length. The Water Globe shot forth first, exploding to form a rain of Water Arrows.

The Flame Python flew forward, then exploded in mid-air, sending scorching heat roiling out into the night air. This caused the water droplets to transform into a mist. Guided by Qi from Meng Hao’s Cultivation base, it surrounded the area, sending the five-colored Mist Spirit into confusion. It no longer could identify Meng Hao’s position.

Even Shangguan Xiu’s vision was obscured, leaving him shocked. As soon as the mist appeared, before he had a chance to recover from his surprise, two cold, noiseless beams shot toward him.

A booming sound rang out, and Meng Hao let out a light sigh. Without

hesitation, he changed his direction and kept moving forward, swallowing a Demonic core to replenish himself. Behind him, a furious roar could be heard, and the fog was instantly dispersed by a sweeping whirlwind. Shangguan Xiu moved forward, an angry look on his face, blood dripping from a wound on his right hand. The Mist Spirit was nowhere in sight.

As he thought back to what had just happened, his eyes narrowed. Were it not for his quick reaction in detonating the Mist Spirit to block the two wooden swords, he would have lost his right hand. Even still, his hand had been cut open. Even more alarming, he felt the spiritual energy within his body slowly leaking out through the wound. Furthermore, the wound was not healing as fast as normal. He could stop the flow of blood, but not the leakage of spiritual energy.

“This swine is just too crafty. He has some low-level techniques, but he uses them in a multitude of tricky ways. It’s really difficult to deal with!” Shangguan Xiu frowned, but he continued on with his dogged pursuit.

The two of them moved on, and time passed. Before long, dawn had arrived. After a night of chasing and fleeing, both of them were exhausted. As for Meng Hao, he had it a bit better off. Even though he did not have any chance to rest, he had experienced this sort of pursuit in the black mountain. The only difference was that sadly, these wild mountains didn’t seem to contain any Demonic beasts. If they did, then it would have been a bit easier to deal with Shangguan Xiu.

As for Shangguan Xiu, this was his first time dealing with a Cultivator like Meng Hao, who released an endless stream of tricky methods. The two wooden swords were especially astonishing; he had originally planned to chase Meng Hao until his spiritual energy ran out. Instead, he seemed to be as lively and full of energy as a dragon or tiger. Did he have an infinite supply of medicinal pills?

“If he’s this difficult to deal with at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, how terrible would he be at a higher level?” Shangguan Xiu clenched his jaw, swallowed a medicinal pill, then continued in his pursuit. He was of the ninth level of the Qi Condensation stage, the same stage as Meng Hao. Despite his slightly superior speed, he could still do little more than chase.

Of course, he didn't know that even though Meng Hao was at the seventh level, his Cultivation method was not the ordinary method used in the Reliance Sect, but rather that of the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Even though Meng Hao had not studied any special texts related to attack techniques, in matters related to spiritual energy, he could persist for much longer periods of time than the average Cultivator.

With the added help of some Demonic cores, then there was no way that Shangguan Xiu could catch him in any short period of time.

By the time dawn broke, the two of them had travelled a very long distance. In front of Meng Hao appeared an incredibly high mountain, its peak stretching up into the skies, its top half wreathed in snow. At a single glance, one could tell that this was not an ordinary place.

Chapter 50: Iron Spear

As soon as he caught sight of the mountain ahead of him, Meng Hao's eyes began to shine. It was clearly beyond the ordinary, and perhaps even contained some Demonic beasts. In any case, he didn't have much time to think about it. His body flashed as he shot directly toward the mountainous forest which lay at its foot.

Behind him, Shangguan Xiu's expression changed. His Cultivation base was higher than Meng Hao's; he had tread the Cultivation world for many years, and had seen many things. He could tell that something was fishy about this mountain. But as he saw Meng Hao charge forward, he put aside his doubts, gritted his teeth, and followed.

Meanwhile on the plateau, white-robed Wu Dingqiu and Eccentric Song sat, seemingly playing chess, but in reality focused on the fighting going on below them. From their vantage point, it was clear that the Violet Fate Sect disciples were stuck in the mountain forest, and after an entire night, could not step foot onto the mountain. One by one, they were rebuffed by the Demonic beasts.

"The Violet Fate Sect disciples truly are beyond ordinary," said Eccentric Song, laughing. "To be able to stay in the Spirit Beast forest for an entire night is excellent. Wu Dingqiu, you really should be proud." He looked extremely complacent, and even happier when he saw the dark look on Wu Dingqiu's face.

Wu Dingqiu's face sank even deeper as he saw the sorry state of his disciples within the forest. He let out a cold harrumph.

"Wu Dingqiu, you should really proud. Last time the Golden Frost Sect came to me to engage in trial by fire, they were all defeated by my Spirit beasts. Not a single one could make it to my treasure mountain to see the truly powerful Spirit beasts. I felt really sad about that. I really hope that your Violet Fate Sect disciples can make a good showing. This Spirit forest is filled with Spirit beasts that I meticulously selected. For example, that one." He proudly pointed a finger toward a white-colored ape.

Its entire body, even its eyes, were as white as snow, and its appearance was incredibly fierce. With a single swipe of its claws, it slashed the arm of one of the Violet Fate Sect disciples, sending blood spraying everywhere. It moved with incredible speed, like a white wind. It had already injured about seven or eight surrounding Violet Fate Sect disciples.

“That is a Snow Peak Mutated beast, rarely seen in the world. I got my hands on it about ten years ago. It’s extremely rare. Look at its fur, as pure white as snow and as smooth as silk. I should be able to sell it for a hefty price one day.” Eccentric Song laughed, pleased with himself. White-robed Wu Dingqiu looked even more grim. He’d never imaged that after all these years, Eccentric Song’s treasure mountain would have so many powerful Demonic beasts.

Even as Eccentric Song spoke, a figure appeared near the edge of the forest near the white ape. It was Meng Hao, with Shangguan Xiu hot on his tail. Eccentric Song laughed.

“So, some outsiders have decided to intrude. Wu Dingqiu, please observe what it means to keep one’s promise. I will not prevent any Cultivator of the Qi Condensation stage from entering this area. Anyone can enter. Although they will surely die, I will not block them.”

Wu Dingqiu let out a cold snort, not paying the least bit of attention to Meng Hao and Shangguan Xiu. Instead, he stared at the white ape, which had just encountered another Violet Fate Sect disciple. He appeared to be about seventeen or eighteen years old. His hands flickered in incantation patterns, and suddenly the image of an ancient scroll unfurled behind him. Qi billowed forth, pushing down onto the white ape. It shrieked.

“A fine Mutated ape,” said Wu Dingqiu “Eccentric Song, no matter how incredible that beast is, it’s going to become my disciple’s pet! His name is Shi Yan. Upon entering the Sect, he acquired that ancient scroll, which at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, can capture Demonic beasts.” Inside, Wu Dingqiu’s heart pounded, but his expression was cool and indifferent, somewhat proud. Considering his status and Cultivation base, he shouldn’t allow such an expression onto his face. But Eccentric Song made it impossible for him to hold back, especially after the humiliation

of the previous night.

However, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, a piteous wail could be heard. Blood showered from Shi Yan's chest, and his ancient scroll collapsed into pieces. He retreated backwards, fear in his eyes. The white ape's body began to expand, until it was nearly six meters tall. It beat its chest, seeming to brim with power.

Eccentric Song laughed loudly. Wu Dingqiu stared at the white ape, his face twisted, fighting the impulse to charge forward and crush the thing to death.

It was at that moment that Meng Hao shot out of the forest. As soon as he caught sight of the roaring ape, his eyes glittered brightly. He also saw the frightened young man off in the distance, but didn't have time to consider the situation.

With people present, Meng Hao wouldn't reveal the copper mirror. His eyes flashed as the white ape took notice of him. The beast charged him, howling ferociously. Meng Hao lifted his right hand, and suddenly an iron spear appeared, the one Fatty's father had created according to his specifications. The young Cultivator named Shi Yan watched as the spear appeared.

Of course, in addition to the long spear, the copper mirror also emerged, concealed within Meng Hao's sleeve. The sleeve was so wide that any observers would not be able to see it, especially considering how their eyes would be drawn to the long spear.

The spear was made of common iron, but its surface was covered with various complicated designs, all of which Meng Hao had designed. At a glance, it appeared to be extraordinary in nature. Brandishing the spear, he moved forward, pointing it toward the charging ape.

Suddenly, the white ape's large mouth exploded violently, blood and flesh flying around. Wretched screams immediately sounded out. The ape fell down onto the ground, looking at Meng Hao in astonishment.

"Perhaps when the mirror shines onto a beast with lots of fur, it causes some kind of disorder in the Qi within its body, making it swell. Demonic

beasts are even bigger and stronger, so it will attempt to escape from any weak point in the body, not just the rear end, thus leading to these explosive injuries.” Of course, all of this was just speculation, but Meng Hao seemed to understand the mirror a bit better after seeing what happened to the white ape. After having the copper mirror for three years, he felt this was pretty close to the truth.

Now was not the time for contemplation, however. Not giving the miserable white ape another glance, he shot off with the iron spear in hand. He was gone in an instant. Just then, Shangguan Xiu arrived. He looked at the white ape in shock.

The white ape was also surprised. And then it noticed that Shangguan Xiu also happened to be carrying a spear, and its fury exploded. It pounced toward Shangguan Xiu.

Back on the plateau, Eccentric Song’s laughter had ceased. Next to him, Wu Dingqiu also watched on in surprise. They stared at Meng Hao and his iron spear, their eyes filled with amazement.

Meng Hao sped through the Demonic Beast forest, listening to the howls of the white ape and the roars of Shangguan Xiu. His eyes flickered, and he harrumphed coldly. Not too much time passed before he heard another commotion coming from up ahead. Soon, he saw four or five Cultivators wearing white robes, engaged in vicious combat with three Demonic beasts, each of them two meters tall.

One was a large black tiger, the other was a peacock whose body emanated a glowing, violet light. The last was an enormous giant rat, fierce and cruel in appearance, seemingly unable to be killed.

As soon as Meng Hao appeared in the midst of the fight, a vicious light appeared in the peacock’s eyes, and it charged like an insane gale, straight toward Meng Hao.

Looking as calm as ever, Meng Hao kept moving forward, pointing the iron spear forward. Suddenly, the giant peacock’s body trembled, and it shrieked miserably. Then, its head exploded, and it fell to the ground, dead, surrounded by blood and gore. The black tiger and the giant rat were

shocked. As they stared dumbly, Meng Hao's body turned into a streak of light, and he shot off into the distance.

As for the Violet Fate Sect disciples, they watched, dumbfounded, as Meng Hao disappeared. His iron spear had left them awestruck.

Not pausing for even a moment, Meng Hao continued on. At this moment, Shangguan Xiu had resumed his furious pursuit.

A grim smile appeared on Meng Hao's face. He increased his speed, charging forward. Every time he encountered a Demonic beast, he would wave his spear at it, and it would retreat, crying out miserably. Not a single beast could block his path. In contrast, Shangguan Xiu was blocked at every turn. His enraged roars sounded further and further away from Meng Hao.

Meng Hao also encountered more and more young, white-robed Cultivators along his way, all of them locked in deadly battles with Demonic beasts. As he passed, he would cause these seemingly unmatchable, fierce creatures to flinch back with blood-curdling screams. The Cultivators would look at Meng Hao's retreating figure with awe.

"Who was that?"

"That long spear is some kind of magical item! It's so powerful!"

"How vicious! Dammit, if I had a spear like that, I could run amok through this Demonic Beast Forest."

Conversation buzzed among the Violet Fate Sect disciples, caused by Meng Hao's shocking passage. On top of the plateau, Wu Dingqiu's eyes glittered, and a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. His laughter rang out, filled with joy as well as a pleased anger.

"So these are Mutated beasts," he said. "Excellent, excellent. They are all amazing beasts. Let me have a look. Hmm, some are missing eyes, others have had their heads ripped off. There are some whose entire bodies are covered with blood. One even had its butt exploded. Eccentric Song, didn't you say that this Demonic Beast Forest was fertilized with soil from the East Sea? And didn't you say that these Mutated beasts were all amazing?"

It seems they are having a bit of a rough time today.”

An unsightly expression filled Eccentric Song’s face as he watched Meng Hao make his way through the Demonic Creature Forest. He watched all his precious Demonic beasts retreating with blood-curdling cries, covered with blood. When he saw the death of the peacock, his heart felt as if it had been stabbed with a knife. This type of peacock was called a Snow Phoenix and was extremely rare. He had paid quite an exorbitant price for it several years ago, and had cared for it like a treasured jewel. And yet the iron spear had exploded its head in an instant. Even though it was dead, its powerful life force caused the corpse to twitch and writhe. Eccentric Song felt extreme regret, but his eyes shone forth with an air of indifference.

“Who cares?” he said. “There are a multitude of Spirit beasts in my Spirit Beast Forest. There’s no harm in it. In any case, this kid isn’t one of your Violet Fate Sect disciples, so what are you looking so happy for?!” He spoke in a light tone, but inside, his heart was beginning to pound.

Chapter 51: My Treasure Mountain...

“Even though this kid isn’t a disciple of my Violet Fate Sect, you said anyone could enter this area. Seeing him run wild in your crappy mountain forest makes me feel good. I’m happy, so what?” Wu Dingqiu laughed, obviously feeling quite pleased. He had been reigning himself in all night, and now he knew that even though Eccentric Song spoke casually, he was hiding his discomfiture. Feeling quite pleasant, Wu Dingqiu looked down below at Meng Hao.

“That magic item of his can really dominate the Spirit Beasts,” said Eccentric Song. “His Cultivation base is low, though. He won’t be able to make it out of the Spirit Beast Forest. This forest is planted with trees I harvested from Southern Heaven. It is watered with Spirit Water from the Milky Way Sea. Not only do the trees grow tall and strong, but they emit spiritual energy which the Spirit beasts can assimilate through Tu Na. In my Spirit Beast Forest, there is also...” His voice came to a sudden, screeching stop.

Meng Hao shot forward, attracting the attention of the surrounding Demonic beasts. He was nearing the foot of the Spirit mountain; it was only a few hundred meters away. He was about to enter the region that none of the Violet Fate disciples had made it to.

Even though Meng Hao didn’t know why this area had so many white-robed disciples, he could sense that there was something odd going on. But with Shangguan Xiu on his tail, there wasn’t much time to think about it. He continued to move forward through the forest. Suddenly, an enormous Demonic beast, nearly four meters tall, burst out in front of him.

It was a gigantic woolly mammoth, with red eyes and sharp, gleaming tusks. Its body was like a small mountain, and the earth shook as it charged with shocking power.

“The kid is dead this time,” Eccentric Song said casually. “This is my Mutated mammoth, which I captured in the Life-wasting Cave, one of the

most dangerous places in the Southern Domain. I raised it with medicinal pills, and it is one of the three most powerful Spirit beasts protecting this area. It has limitless power and incredibly thick skin. Ordinary flying swords can't even scratch it. It is also proficient in a variety of magic techniques. Even someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation would have trouble dealing with it. It can stop anyone under the Foundation Establishment stage." Eccentric Song's eyes had almost popped out of his head when he saw Meng Hao about to make it out of the Beast Forest. But now, he let out a sigh of relief.

Wu Dingqiu stopped smiling for the moment. He could see that this mammoth was no ordinary creature. The Violet Fate Sect didn't possess many Mutated beasts, but after hearing Eccentric Song blather on about it, he couldn't help but frown and mutter to himself that the man really was strange. He didn't care much at all for Cultivation, but loved seeking out Demonic beasts to raise, especially ones as strange as this.

Then, Wu Dingqiu's eyes began to shine. Eccentric Song's expression suddenly changed, and he shot to his feet, a horrified expression on his face.

Within the Demonic Forest, the Demonic mammoth charged at Meng Hao. Meng Hao took in a deep breath and retreated a bit, groaning inwardly about how many Demonic beasts were in this place. He raised the iron spear and pointed it. The charging Demonic mammoth stopped and began to quiver, then suddenly, its trunk exploded with a bang. Half of it flew through the air to land onto a nearby tree, which collapsed under its weight.

Enraged with pain, the mammoth continued to charge. Meng Hao waved his spear, and a boom sounded out. The mammoth's back exploded, then its mouth. Finally, its right front leg completely shattered, and it fell to the ground, skidding to a halt some distance away.

Horrific shrieks filled the Beast Forest. Meng Hao looked a bit pale-faced. He glanced around, then charged forward, leaving the Demonic Forest behind and entering the treasure mountain.

Some distance behind, Shangguan Xiu was in a tight spot, unable to free himself from the surrounding, red-eyed Demonic beasts. He could only watch as Meng Hao disappeared, his fury billowing up to the heavens.

Meng Hao left the forest, leaving behind a long trail of blood, as well as the miserable cries of the various Demonic beasts. It looked like some kind of Judgement day had just passed. The white-robed disciples stared in shock, panting and murmuring about the viciousness.

Meng Hao continued on up the treasure mountain, hoping that if he could pass over it, maybe he could finally shake off Shangguan Xiu. He moved forward at rapid speed, and soon reached the foot of the mountain. As soon as he stepped foot onto it, he suddenly stopped and stared in astonishment. Up ahead, lying beneath a boulder, was a pill bottle.

Multicolored strands of light wafted about it; it was clearly not an ordinary item. Meng Hao picked it up and opened it. Immediately, a fragrant medicinal smell wafted out. Inside was a medicinal pill the size of a thumb!

Looking shaken, Meng Hao placed the bottle into his bag of holding. Now he knew what all the white-robed disciples were doing in the area; they were trying to reach this mountain.

“That’s a Universe Spirit Pill, extremely useful to anyone in the Qi Condensation stage.” Wu Dingqiu laughed as he looked at the trail Meng Hao had left through the Demonic Forest.

Next to him, Eccentric Song had an extremely unsightly expression on his face. And yet, he let out a cold laugh. “My treasure mountain has many medicinal pills and Spirit Stones in it. This kid can grab a medicinal pill, but if he thinks he can reach the top, he’s dreaming. The Spirit Beasts on my treasure mountain are one in a million. Only the best of the best have the requisite latent talent to be placed on the mountain itself.” He spoke as lightly as ever, and yet the pain in his heart grew more and more intense.

“Look there,” said Eccentric Song, pointing at a Demonic beast that rose up ahead of Meng Hao. “That is a fierce beast which I raised myself. It has

the body of a deer and the head of a python. It is extremely fast, and if it's injured, becomes even more fierce. It will never stop fighting until it dies, and once it catches the scent of blood, it goes crazy. A Qi Condensation Cultivator who faces it will surely perish.”

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, miserable shrieks drifted down the side of the mountain. Upon seeing all the blood, Eccentric Song appeared as if he might begin to go crazy. The Demonic beast which would never give up until dying gaped in astonishment, then fled at top speed. Its tail was destroyed and an eye was badly mangled. Worst of all, it only had two legs left. And yet, it still moved quickly, just as Eccentric Song had said. It fled at top speed.

Meng Hao continued forward. Having passed through another Demonic beast's territory, he now encountered a pile of several hundred Spirit Stones. Looking excited, he continued on up the mountain.

Contented laughter rang out from Wu Dingqiu's mouth. In fact, you could say that from Meng Hao's appearance until now, he hadn't stopped laughing.

“Wow, it really could move fast. Wouldn't give up until it died!”

“No matter, no matter. There are many treasures on the mountain, this kid can grab some, but he won't be able to leave with them. After all, he has to come back down the mountain to do that.” The words ‘no matter’ left his lips, and he looked calm, but he pulled out a Concentration Pill from his bag and put it into his mouth. A crazed look had appeared in his eyes, and he felt a dark premonition in his heart.

An hour later ...

Meng Hao had already reached the halfway point up the mountain. The entire time, no matter what Demonic beast came his way, he would send it away screaming. There were a few dangerous situations, but with a wave and point of his iron spear, the danger would melt away. Then, heart beating, he would collect up Spirit Stones, medicinal pills, and magical items.

To Meng Hao, this entire mountain was a treasure trove. Right now, he

was retrieving a scroll painting from behind a big boulder. It emanated a gentle glow along with abundant spiritual energy. It was clearly extraordinary.

Excited, he put it into his bag of holding.

Below him in the Demonic forest, more than a few Violet Fate Sect disciples lifted their heads up and caught sight of him, leaving them shocked.

As Eccentric Song watched all of this happening, his face grew darker and darker, and his body began to tremble. He stared at Meng Hao's bag of holding, inside of which were his Spirit Stones, medicinal pills, and magical treasures; especially the scroll painting. His heart hurt.

The scroll painting was a treasure he had acquired many years ago. Sealed within were the spirits of quite a few beasts. When his most beloved Demonic beast of all had died some years ago, he had sealed it within. And now, Meng Hao had taken it. Eccentric Song's body shook even more violently, so he produced two more Concentration Pills and swallowed them down.

He still struggled to maintain an unconcerned expression, but the ringing sound of Wu Dingqiu's laughter continued to pierce his eardrums.

"My treasure mountain has many treasures," he forced himself to say. "So what if a few of them get taken? He will not be able to escape the mountain. I've carefully collected these Spirit beasts from everywhere in the world. There are too many, he won't be able to escape them easily."

Two hours later...

Meng Hao had almost reached the snowy area past the mountain's halfway point. He wore an excited expression as he sped forward with even greater speed. Down in the Demonic forest, more than half of the Violet Fate Sect disciples engaged in this trial of fire could see him up there on the mountain. Expressions of surprise and envy covered their faces, especially when he stooped over to pick up things from the ground. Each and every one of them wished they could be in his place.

Shangguan Xiu stood, fists clenched, jaw clenched, completely helpless. He did not dare to go up the mountain. He was already in enough danger in the Demonic forest. Furthermore, he had overheard some of the white-robed disciples' conversations, and knew that this was a trial by fire for the disciples of the Violet Fate Sect from the Southern Domain. He felt conflict at heart, and seemed to have no other option than to give up. Only his intense hatred of Meng Hao caused him to reconsider.

As Eccentric Song watched Meng Hao injure the head of yet another of his precious Demonic beasts, he took out three Concentration Pills and swallowed them, continuing to pretend that he didn't care.

"I carefully collected that snow from the tops of auspicious clouds," he said slowly through his teeth. "It is the most suitable environment for my most treasured Spirit beasts. One of them, the Sky Rending Condor, is well known. Its talons can shatter metal and stone, its wings can kick up a violent wind. It is incredibly fierce, perhaps the most dangerous Spirit beast on the mountain. Even with that crappy spear, this kid is dead for sure when he enters its territory."

Three hours later...

One talon was shattered, half a wing was gone, and the giant condor coughed up blood. Wailing mournfully, it hid itself in the snow, crying out endlessly.

Meng Hao was almost at the peak of the mountain. All of the Violet Fate Set disciples were staring at him. They didn't care any more about fighting with the Demonic beasts. They stared in awe at his glittering, shining iron spear, and their eyes burned.

"Who is this person..."

"He intruded into our trial by fire and took away our rewards... it's too cruel."

"That iron spear is definitely a treasure from the Heavens! It's so ferocious!"

Eccentric Song trembled in distress. He watched as Meng Hao,

approaching the mountain's peak, snatched up a black net. He could no longer feign calm. He stood up and took a step forward, ready to go teach Meng Hao a lesson.

Chapter 52: Bumper Crop

Once, he could endure. Twice, three times, four times, even five times he could continue to endure. By the sixth time, however, he was shamed into a rage and could endure no longer. The Heaven Entangling Net was even more precious to him than the scroll painting. It could instantly entangle an opponent, and had been among his treasured items for years. The higher your Cultivation base, the more effective it became. He had placed it on the treasure mountain to show off its splendor, so that people would see it and covet it. He had assumed it would be safe, and had never imagined that anyone would actually be able to take it. As of now, he had already begun to go crazy, and wished nothing more than to beat Meng Hao to death and take back the oil painting and Heaven Entangling Net.

But then, Wu Dingqiu, laughing smugly, flicked his wide sleeve and stood in front of Eccentric Song, blocking his way.

“Fellow Daoist Song is an illustrious Cultivator from the Southern Domain. What are you doing, exactly? Earlier, you said that for seven days, anyone could come here, and that all of the treasures of the treasure mountain were available for the taking. Don’t tell me you’re going to go back on your word?”

“You carried the peak over here yourself from Mount Tian Shan. The land was fertilized with soil from the bottom of the East Sea which hadn’t seen the light of day for ten thousand years. I remember someone saying that any Cultivator of the Qi Condensation stage could prevail, as long as they were skilled enough. Eccentric Song, acting like this really shows a lack of demeanor. If word gets out, you’ll definitely lose face.” Wu Dingqiu continued to laugh, clearly having no intention of allowing Eccentric Song to go anywhere.

Eccentric Song’s expression looked worse than ever, filled with bitter suffering. Before, he had spoken with utmost complacency, but now, everything he had said was being thrown back in his face. After a long moment, he slapped his bag of holding, pulled out two large Concentration Pills and swallowed them. Then he let out a long breath.

Suddenly, his eyes flashed, and he cast his consciousness out toward Meng Hao, intending to get some information about his iron spear. At first, he hadn't paid the slightest attention to Meng Hao, focused as he was on what the iron spear was doing. As soon as his consciousness emerged, Wu Dingqiu laughed and flicked his sleeve. A glowing shield immediately covered the entire plateau, blocking Eccentric Song's consciousness.

"Using your consciousness to inspect a lower generation Qi Condensation Cultivator? Eccentric Song, are you purposely trying to lose face?" Wu Dingqiu obviously was not willing to let Eccentric Song have his way in anything. He laughed. Eccentric Song, looking more put off than ever, could do nothing except flick his own sleeve. Another shield appeared just beyond the first shield.

"That kid's iron spear is extraordinary," he said. "If you won't allow me to inspect it with my consciousness, then I won't let you do so either."

Four hours later, Meng Hao had reached the mountain's peak, iron spear in hand. He walked up, look around, finally noticing the large flag stuck into the ground. Underneath the flag was a bag. Its surface was a mass of rioting colors; looking at it made you feel as if it could suck your mind out. Everything around it seemed to ripple and grow blurry. When Meng Hao laid eyes on it, he palpitated with eagerness and started panting. He grabbed the multicolored bag, and when he did, the flag fell to the ground.

Conversations had buzzed among the onlookers in the Demonic Forest as they watched Meng Hao calmly walked up the mountain, collecting huge amounts of Spirit Stones and medicinal pills. When the flag toppled more conversations broke out.

They gazed at Meng Hao with shock and envy, and then watched as he disappeared over the other side of the mountain.

Shangguan Xiu glared at Meng Hao murderously as he vanished. He didn't dare to pursue him; there were too many things about him he didn't know. Even though Shangguan Xiu's desire to kill him was stronger than ever, he also knew that it was almost too late to reach his medicinal herb plant. Gnashing his teeth, he stamped his foot onto the ground, looking

very pitiful indeed. But anger pushed away his depression. He would have killed Meng Hao already, if he could only have thought of a way.

As he watched Meng Hao disappear onto the other side of the mountain, Wu Dingqiu's laughter rang out over the plateau. Eccentric Song stared with wide eyes as Meng Hao took his bag of the Cosmos. The blood drained from his face, and he seemed heartbroken. Now more than ever he regretted putting his bag of the Cosmos onto the mountain. He just couldn't believe what had happened. This time, he really couldn't endure any longer. He flicked his sleeve, and prepared to pursue the damnable Meng Hao. But, before he could leave, Wu Dingqiu once again blocked his way.

"Wu Dingqiu, you still dare to block me!" shouted heartbroken Eccentric Song. "The flag is fallen. You didn't win our bet, and I didn't lose. The trial by fire is over. If you continue to obstruct my way, you can't blame me for attacking you!"

"Fellow Daoist Song, we agreed ahead of time that neither of us would leave before we finished this game of Go. You are a grand, illustrious Cultivator of the Southern Domain. Don't tell me you're going to go back on your word? When I made to leave earlier, you wouldn't let me. Yet you wish to leave before finishing our game?" Wu Dingqiu laughed as he used Eccentric Song's own words against him. Not a trace of a frown remained on his face, which was now filled with a wide smile. He clearly would not allow the other man to leave. Seeing the bag of the Cosmos taken away had filled his heart with joy. Eccentric Song had waved that bag in front of him mockingly for hundreds of years; to see him hoisted on his own petard was wondrous to the extreme.

"You..." Eccentric Song glared murderously at Wu Dingqiu, and didn't say anything for a long moment. Then, he gritted his teeth and stamped his foot down, shaking the mountain so hard it seemed it would collapse. But considering his status and prestige, he could do nothing more than sit back down and begin playing Go again.

Of course, Wu Dingqiu wouldn't let him have his way so simply. He stroked his beard as he looked at Eccentric Song's unsightly expression.

Laughing, he very slowly picked up a Go piece and then purposefully put a very thoughtful expression onto his face. After a very, very long time, he slowly put the piece onto the board, his face solemn, as if he intended to make this game last for months.

“Leave the mountain,” said Wu Dingqiu, transmitting his voice to all of his white-robed disciples. “After I finish this game of Go, I will accompany you back to the Sect. In the meantime, the next stage of your trial by fire is to find the man you just saw on the mountain peak. I’ve taken a fancy to that treasured spear he has. Bring that spear back to me, and you will be promoted to the Inner Sect!” Each and every one of the disciples perked up at hearing this.

“Is the dignified Violet Fate Sect of the Southern Domain really going to kill people to take treasures?” said Eccentric Song. He was incredibly depressed, stuck in place because of his own words. But even though he hated Meng Hao, he couldn’t pass up an opportunity to cause trouble for Wu Dingqiu.

Glaring at Eccentric Song, Wu Dingqiu said, “Listen well. You must not cause problems for that person. You must trade with him, not rob him. Anyone who violates this command will be expelled from the Sect!” His next move in the Go game was even slower than the previous.

The Violet Fate Sect disciples scattered in all directions. Some of them circled around the treasure mountain in pursuit of Meng Hao; others went as fast as possible in different directions, hoping to intercept him.

Their trial by fire had been an utter defeat, something they were not reconciled to. However, they didn’t hold any ill will against Meng Hao, but rather admired him. After all, they had all witnessed the blood-soaked events of moments ago.

All of them were determined to get the iron spear from Meng Hao. They would trade anything to get it, and if he was unwilling to trade, would have to think of some tricks to get it.

In any case, they all had clearly heard Elder Wu’s words; they were to trade for the item, not rob it. Although... he had never said they couldn’t

use force.

As the white-robed disciples scattered, Meng Hao raced down the treasure mountain, collecting more Spirit Stones and medicinal pills as he went. Even though he never saw Eccentric Song and Wu Dingqiu, he had guessed that this place was most likely a trial by fire region set up by some Sect.

Even though Shangguan Xiu was no longer chasing him, he knew that whoever's trial by fire he had charged into might not be too happy about his interference. So, he maintained top speed, his heart pounding and his face filled with eagerness.

His bags of holding were all full; he had acquired more this time than on any other occasion since entering the Cultivation world, with the exception of the cave of the Flying Rain-Dragon. He casually packed away the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills.

Of course, the more things he picked up, the faster he tried to move. Gritting his teeth and continuously consuming Demonic Cores, he moved as fast as possible for three days, until he finally emerged from the mountain range. He looked both exhausted and energetic; in the past several days, he hadn't had a chance to organize his treasures, and now all he wanted to do was find a place where he could safely examine everything. As he moved forward, he noticed that far in the distance was what appeared to be a walled city.

He was in the east of the State of Zhao, and this city appeared to be magnificent and beyond ordinary. It was surrounded by a gentle glowing light, a shield which mortals wouldn't be able to see, and only Cultivators could sense.

"This place... it doesn't seem like a city of mortals. Could it be a city of Cultivators?" He stared in surprise, recalling a map of the State of Zhao he had seen. The map had not shown any city in this place. At yet there at the gate of the city, people were coming in and out, almost all of them Cultivators of the Qi Condensation stage. His assumption had been correct.

He decided not to enter the city. Instead, he found a cave in the nearby mountains. Concealing himself inside, he took a deep breath and then began to take everything out of his bags of holding and sort them.

“What medicinal pill is this? It’s incredibly fragrant, even stronger than a Dry Spirit Pill... And this bottle, it has three pills inside, each one as transparent as crystal. They are definitely treasured pills.” Licking his lips, he emptied the contents of two bags of holding, and after counting everything, he found that he had seventy-eight pills. There were many different types, each one seemingly stronger than a Dry Spirit Pill. Meng Hao’s hands shook.

It took a long time for him to collect himself. Stifling his excitement, he pulled out ten more bags of holding.

“There were so many Spirit Stones on that treasure mountain. I just picked up the ones I noticed, and I wasn’t really even paying attention. Yet I acquired so many...” He began breathing hard again as he looked at all the Spirit Stones. When he put them together and counted, he found that he had eight thousand, seven hundred and sixty four!

“I’m rich! Rich!” he murmured. He pulled out another bag of holding, inside of which were flying swords, pearls, two flags, a scroll painting, a black net. All of them were magical items.

His smile nearly split his face as he took the items out. This was especially true when he took out the scroll painting and the black net. They emitted powerful spiritual power, causing his heart to beat rapidly. He slowly unrolled the scroll painting, and a bright light shined out, filling the cave with its brightness and illuminating Meng Hao’s face.

Inside, he could see a depiction of mountains and waters, within which existed a multitude of fantastic creatures. They had been painted, and yet somehow also seemed alive. When he opened the scroll he seemed to hear the roars of tens of thousands of beasts echoing faintly in his ears. His heart shook, and he dropped the painting to the ground.

After some time passed, he recovered from his shock. His eyes shining, he calmed his Qi and picked up the painting again to examine it. It was

clearly an incredibly valuable treasure. Meng Hao's heart beat even faster.

"A treasure! What a true treasure!" he said, breathing deeply. Then he pulled out the black net. Walking out of the cave, he poured some spiritual energy into it, then tossed it into the air.

The black net instantly expanded, growing larger and larger, and flying up higher into the sky. It seemed big enough to be able to envelop the whole mountain, like some powerful black cloud. The mountain began to shake, and cracks appeared on its surface as if it were about to collapse. The suppressive power increased, causing Meng Hao's heart to tremble. Astonished, he lifted his hand, sending out his spiritual energy, causing the black cloud to slowly shrink. It transformed into a black beam which shot back toward him and then became a small, black net.

He grabbed the net, his mouth dry. He breathed for a while, composing himself. His eyes glowed.

"This is better than even the best treasures from the Reliance Sect," he thought, his heart pounding. Then, he pulled out the last item, the multicolored bag.

Chapter 53: How will you thank me?

“This... looks kind of like a bag of holding, but a bit better.” Meng Hao moved it back and forth in his hands, then used his spiritual power to feel it out a bit. Suddenly, his body began to tremble, as if it had been struck by invisible lightning. His eyes widened, revealing complete astonishment. After a long time passed, he lowered his head and looked into the bag.

“It’s so big...” he murmured. It was a bag of holding, but was so large inside that it seemed as if it could contain heaven and earth. The insides were misty, and so boundless that Meng Hao’s heart immediately shook.

It appeared as if entire mountains and rivers could be stored inside. Even though it was empty, its massive capacity was enough to call the bag itself a precious treasure.

Meng Hao’s mouth and tongue were dry. The Spirit Stones had made him happy. The medicinal pills had made him quiver with eagerness. And then there were the magical items. The scroll painting had shocked him and the spiritual might of the black colored net had left him shaken. But this bag left his head buzzing. It took a long time to pull himself together.

“I’m rich. This is true wealth...” Meng Hao muttered to himself, gripping the multicolored bag tightly. But then the expression on his face suddenly changed.

“If that was truly some great Sect’s trial by fire, it wouldn’t be a big deal if I interfered, but they surely won’t let me get away with so many treasures, medicinal pills and Spirit Stones.” His heart began to thump, and a conflicted look appeared on his head. However, he was determined not to give up the treasures he had acquired.

He organized everything carefully, then breathed in deeply and looked out at the evening. He emerged from the cave and left the mountains, looking thoughtfully at the walled city off in the distance.

“I have a lot of medicinal pills,” he muttered to himself as he gazed at the city with glittering eyes, “but I don’t recognize any of them. Therefore, I can’t safely consume any of them.” He began to walk toward the city.

He moved quickly, and soon approached the city gate, above which were written three characters.

Eastern Refinement City.

The characters had an ancient feel to them, and had clearly been there for more than just a few years. Their faded surfaces made one feel as if they had seen ages come and go.

“Refinement is similar to Cultivation. And this is the East. The meaning of this city’s name is relatively straight-forward.” [TL note: The character for “Refinement” is pronounced similar to the character for “Cultivation.”]

As soon as Meng Hao stepped foot into the city gate, he saw two disciples standing there chatting. Their gaze settled onto Meng Hao.

They wore light blue robes and were both at the third level of Qi Condensation.

“Fellow Daoist, please pay your tax before entering the city.” His smile disappeared as he felt the pressure of Meng Hao’s Cultivation base.

“Fellow Daoists, I can tell from a glance that you are from a great Sect. I myself am from a small Sect, and I just came off the mountain. This being my first time here, could I trouble you two Fellow Daoists to give me some information about this place?” Meng Hao was innately scholarly, and spoke in a very polite manner. The two low-level Cultivators were instantly impressed, and the young man who had just spoken laughed.

“Well spoken, well spoken! Fellow Daoist, your Cultivation base is quite refined. If this is your first time out of the Sect, then I suspect your name will become quite well-known in the future.” The young man smiled as he spoke. For someone with such a profound Cultivation base to treat him so politely left him feeling quite pleased. “This is Eastern Refinement City, founded by the Three Great Sect Alliance of the State of Zhao, and one of the great Cultivation Cities in the State of Zhao. In order to enter, you have to pay a tax of one Spirit Stone.

“The cost is actually three Spirit Stones, but for you, just one will do. Please note, fighting is forbidden within the city limits. Violators will be

punished severely by the three Sects. You must not forget this point.” He held out a wooden tablet to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao thanked him hurriedly and paid his one Spirit Stone. Then, he saluted with clasped hands and passed through the city gate.

He felt a bit of regret about the Spirit Stone. It was only one, but it was still money as far as Meng Hao was concerned. He might have over eight-thousand more in his bag, but he was very familiar with the copper mirror’s appetite for Spirit Stones, and knew that it wasn’t actually very much at all.

“What an expensive tax. If I didn’t absolutely have to come here, I wouldn’t pay it.” He walked quickly through the city, looking around. Dusk was falling, but the city still bustled, with people walking to and fro everywhere. The streets were filled with shops, most of which emitted brightly glowing lights. A single look confirmed that this was no ordinary place.

Everyone was a Cultivator. As he walked through the city, he didn’t see a single mortal. However, all of these Cultivators were of the Qi Condensation stage. Scanning the crowds, Meng Hao only saw about three people who, like him, were at the seventh level. Most were at the sixth, or lower.

Meng Hao walked down the broad streets, looking for shops that sold medicinal pills. He didn’t buy any, but rather asked questions. Three days passed, during which time Meng Hao traversed the entire city, visiting over thirty medicinal pill shops.

Even still, he only could find out information about seven or eight of the dozens of types of medicinal pills in his bag of holding. And yet, Meng Hao was excited. Of the pills he had learned about, each and every one was considerably expensive. One of them was a Spirit Establishment Pill, worth fifty Spirit Stones, only useful at the seventh level of Qi Condensation.

In his bag of holding, he had eight of them altogether.

“Too bad there are so many pills that I still don’t know anything about.”

On the third day, Meng Hao hesitated, then finally walked into an extremely luxurious building in the western district of the city.

It was three stories tall and emitted a glowing light. Even from a long distance, one could see its shine. Before, Meng Hao noticed that almost everyone who entered was of the sixth level of Qi condensation. There were even some of the eighth or ninth levels, and it seemed this was the only building they were willing to enter.

When he saw the name on the building, he was even more resolved to enter.

Hundred Treasures Pavilion.

The inside was filled with carved balustrades and marble steps. Everything seemed to be made of jade, and as soon as he stepped inside, Meng Hao instantly felt a dense spiritual force brush against his face. A dazzling assortment of displayed items met his eyes; medicinal pill bottles, flying swords, pearls, banners and other items could be seen everywhere.

There weren't a lot of Cultivators present, so it was relatively quiet. They walked around separately in groups of four or five, each one accompanied by a young woman wearing a long, pink dress. The girls' voices were light and airy, and they humbly answered all queries about the various items.

None of that was of very much interest to Meng Hao, though. What really captured his attention was some distance away on the second floor. Next to the stair case was an enormous Pill furnace. Wisps of smoke curled around it, and sitting next to it was a middle-aged man in a long black robe. He sat there cross-legged, back straight, expressionless, doing Tu Na breathing exercises with his eyes closed.

He emanated a trace amount of power, but it was difficult to sense, as if he were keeping most of it hidden. If he didn't, the entire pavilion would probably begin to collapse.

"A Foundation Establishment Cultivator..." Meng Hao's pupils constricted. This middle-aged man emitted the same type of Qi as Grand Elder Ouyang, making it immediately obvious to Meng Hao that his Cultivation base was at the Foundation Establishment stage, far above

everyone else's.

"I wonder if the day will ever come in which I have a chance to be a Foundation Establishment Cultivator." After all the things he had experienced in the Reliance Sect, his heart was filled with the desire to become powerful. Right now, his head was lowered, but his eyes were filled with determination and stubbornness. His resolve was even stronger than ever.

"By using the Cultivation method of the Sublime Spirit Scripture, when I establish my Foundation, it will be Flawless, much more powerful than Cracked or Fragmented. I will be strong even among Foundation Establishment stage Cultivators." He took in a deep breath and raised his head. A young woman in a pink dress approached him. She was beautiful, and wore a relaxed smile on her face. She greeted Meng Hao with a slight bow. As she did, the front of her dress dropped, revealing an abundance of milky tenderness.

"Daoist Brother, do you need any assistance?" she asked.

Meng Hao's face immediately turned scarlet, and he murmured to himself that he shouldn't look at inappropriate things. Despite his determination, he couldn't help but glance down, and his heart began to race. Even though he had been in the Reliance Sect for three years, he hadn't spent time with any female disciples other than Elder Sister Xu. As for what he was looking at now he hadn't seen anything like it in his entire life. His face was a bit dark, but at the moment you couldn't tell at all.

"Do you have any jade slips which describe medicinal pills?" he asked with a dry cough, trying to cover up his embarrassment.

The girl was young, but her demeanor suggested she was quite experienced. She could instantly sense Meng Hao's awkwardness, and was quite amused. Throughout her years, she had seen many customers, but few like Meng Hao. Holding back a laugh, she smiled and leaned closer toward him so that he would catch a scent of her perfume.

When the fragrant scent reached his face, Meng Hao's face grew even

redder. His eyes, however, contained no lasciviousness. Instead they were wide and clear; he was fundamentally not given to lust. He was just inexperienced with women, thus his flushed face.

“Of course we have jade slips regarding medicinal pills,” she said with a wink. “Please follow me, Daoist Brother.” She found his increasing awkwardness to be very cute. She turned, her waist swaying, her curves entrancing. Meng Hao couldn’t help but look, and again his heart began to race. With a bitter smile, he gave a light cough and hurried to follow her.

She led him to a lattice shelf off to the side which was filled with various pieces of jade. Amongst them, on a white tray, were three slips of jade, inscribed with the characters Three Jade Slip. “These jade slips introduce most of the medicinal pills that can be found in the State of Zhao. However, this is a copy, so the contents are somewhat unclear.”

When she saw Meng Hao raising his hand to take them, she smiled. “You can’t look unless you buy. The Three Jade Slip costs one hundred spirit stones.” When she smiled, two beautiful dimples appeared. As she looked at Meng Hao, she thought that even though his face was a bit dark, it contained a scholarly and youthful charm.

As her perfume wafted around Meng Hao, he pulled his hand back and focused himself. He looked thoughtfully at the Three Jade Piece. It seemed just a bit too expensive, and he was hesitant to part with that many Spirit Stones.

“Is there anything that provides even more information than this?” he asked after a while, clenching his jaw. His whole purpose in coming here had been to buy a jade slip such as this.

“Of course!” replied the girl with another wink. “Follow me.” She led Meng Hao to another corner, then pointed to a jade slip on a shelf. It was covered with small cracks.

“This is not a copy. It’s an ancient jade slip which contains records of the various medicinal pills of the Southern Domain. It even details information about poison pills and their antidotes. Furthermore, it contains very realistic artistic depictions of the pills. Unfortunately, it is

cracked, and will eventually shatter. You will only be able to read it four or five times.”

Upon hearing her words, Meng Hao’s heart quivered. He needed it, not for long-term use, but to solve the problem of his current situation.

“Daoist Brother, I hope you don’t mind,” she said with a smile, leaning close and lowering her voice. “The cost of this item is two hundred Spirit Stones. You should understand that if it wasn’t cracked, it would be worth over one thousand. If you really want it, I can help you apply for a cost reduction. But, how will you thank me?”

Chapter 54: An Old Friend from the Sect

“I... I’m just a scholar...” Meng Hao gaped, his mouth wide, unsure of how to respond. When he had bought things back in Yunjie County, he had never encountered a situation like this. To have a beautiful girl smiling sweetly at him, looking so charming, caused the red flush to suddenly fill his face once again.

Seeing Meng Hao’s embarrassed expression, the young woman covered her mouth and laughed softly. She turned, her waist swaying enchantingly as she walked over to the Pill oven. She lowered her head to speak to the middle-aged man who sat there in meditation.

When she returned, she winked at Meng Hao. “How about one hundred seventy Spirit Stones?”

“Many thanks, Fellow Daoist,” said Meng Hao, sucking in a breath. Looking pleased at having saved a few Spirit stones, he quickly saluted with clasped fists.

“You can call me big sis,” she said, holding the jade slips out to Meng Hao.

He accepted them, then cast some spiritual power into them. Immediately a vast tableau appeared in his mind. Glancing over it eagerly, he already noticed three of the pills that were contained in his bag of holding. He pulled out the one hundred seventy Spirit Stones and gave them to the girl, then cupped his hands together as he made to leave. The girl sighed and escorted him all the way to the door.

“My name is Qiao Ling,” she said, her eyes filled with an interesting look. “Remember to ask for me next time you come.” She looked him up and down as she spoke, her eyes charming and filled with poise. Meng Hao, face scarlet, saluted her and retreated as quickly as possible.

His heart pounded as he left, and didn’t calm down for quite some time. He looked back at the Hundred Treasures Pavilion and caught sight of Qiao Ling standing there smiling softly at him.

He felt even more embarrassed. She had taken liberties with him!

He had never experienced a feeling such as this before. It wasn't a bad feeling, and he actually enjoyed it a bit. Coughing again, he lowered his head and continued walking.

About this time, a group of people emerged from the second floor of the Hundred Treasure's Pavilion. There were about seven or eight of them, including men and women. As they walked, they chatted with each other. Among them was a young man wearing a light blue robe, walking in the back. He didn't look like he belonged, as if he were an attendant.

As the group left the pavilion, the young man happened to lift his head and catch sight of Meng Hao.

"Meng Hao!" he cried, staring. This caught the attention of the other men and women, as well as Meng Hao, who stopped walking and looked back to see all of them looking at him.

His expression did not change, but in his heart he felt conflicting emotions. The young man was none other than Zhou Kai, former disciple of the Reliance Outer Sect. His Cultivation base was at the fifth level of Qi Condensation. On the day of the Sect's dissolution, he had been rolled out by the red fog, and here he was today.

He seemed to be somewhat down and out, following a group of people dressed in expensive, brocaded garments. Most of them had threatening demeanors, and one of them was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation. The rest appeared to be at the sixth. They were clearly members of the great Sects of the State of Zhao.

Obviously, Zhou Kai had joined them after the dissolution of the Reliance Sect. For him to be with group such as this, he obviously could only claim the status of an attendant.

Meng Hao nodded to him but didn't say anything. He turned and made to leave.

"Who is this?" said a young man who stood next to Zhou Kai. He spoke lightly, but his tone was one of pride and arrogance. He wore a

resplendent robe and held a fan in his hand. He was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, and the others standing around them began to whisper among themselves and watch.

“Elder Brother Sun, this is a fellow member of my former Sect,” said Zhou Kai hesitatingly, not mentioning Meng Hao’s name or his status in the Sect.

“Meng Hao... that name sounds familiar.”

“I remember,” said one of the women in the group with a laugh. “He’s the only remaining member of the Reliance Inner Sect. He looks a lot like the drawing.”

The eyes of all the onlookers suddenly began to shine. Two people dashed ahead to block Meng Hao’s path. In recent days in the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao, rumors of a shocking matter had been circulating.

The Reliance Sect had disbanded, but Patriarch Reliance wasn’t dead. He had put on a display of power all for the sake of a single Inner Sect disciple. He had frightened the most powerful experts of the State of Zhao, causing a huge sensation. After the experts had returned from the scene, these rumors had spread across the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao.

Even more hotly discussed was how Founder Reliance had given his Inner Sect disciple a precious treasure, something powerful enough to shake the heavens and earth and kill any and all Cultivators. These rumors spread fast and wide, and as inquiries were made of the former Reliance Sect disciples, this person’s name was soon revealed: Meng Hao.

If things had just ended in this fashion, then the matter would soon have come to rest. However, after returning from the Reliance Sect, the State of Zhao experts gradually realized something. Toward the end, it had seemed as if Patriarch Reliance’s power had begun to wane slightly. Furthermore, considering Patriarch Reliance’s famous temper, how could it be that they all were able to escape, without a single one of them being killed?

Speculation naturally blossomed, and many people began to pay more

and more attention to the Inner Sect disciple Meng Hao. The three great Sects had issued orders that all disciples sent out of the Sect pay close attention and attempt to find Meng Hao. His picture had been distributed along with the order.

Now, people weren't certain. Even if Patriarch Reliance was alive, was his Cultivation base as powerful as before? Filled with misgivings about the matter, the three great Sects had proclaimed rewards would be given to any disciple who, upon encountering Meng Hao, could get information about the power of the treasure he carried.

Meng Hao stood there, looking coldly at the two people blocking his way. He heard footsteps behind him as four others blocked his path of retreat. His left and right paths also contained people. It seemed he was completely surrounded.

Within the Hundred Treasures Pavilion, Qiao Ling looked down with a frown.

"May I help you, sirs and ladies?" said Meng Hao coolly, his gaze sweeping around. His expression seemed indifferent, as calm as still water. He seemed completely confident, yet also cautious.

"No," said the extravagantly dressed young man with a smile, fanning himself. "We've just heard that Meng Hao has a gift bestowed upon him by Patriarch Reliance. Having happened to run into you, we were hoping to take a look." Within his smile glinted an icy coldness. And yet, his heart was circumspect; any treasured gift given by Patriarch Reliance should be treated with utmost caution.

But, these were disciples of the three Great Sects, which granted them extremely high status. Therefore, despite Meng Hao being at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, they still felt themselves above him.

"That's right," said another of the people surrounding him. He laughed. "Fellow Daoist Meng does have the treasure. Why not take it out for us to have a look?" He clearly viewed Meng Hao as being completely boxed in, with no way out.

Meng Hao looked as calm as ever, his eyes shining with a cold light. His

mouth twisted mockingly, and he suddenly slapped his bag of holding, causing the people surrounding him to dodge to the side. Some of them even pulled out magical items.

A beam of light flashed, and suddenly, Meng Hao's iron spear appeared in his hand. He stabbed it down into the ground, imbuing it with some spiritual energy so that it appeared to be a mighty weapon. It hummed, the sound reverberating about, causing the surrounding people to unconsciously take a step back, their gazes fixed on the spear.

"Whoever wishes to die can come up for a closer look," said Meng Hao coolly, taking two steps back and flicking his wide sleeve. He appeared supremely confident, especially his mocking eyes and smile, as if he knew beyond doubt that anyone who attempted to look closely at the spear would be killed by it.

Actually, Meng Hao had taken two steps back because it brought him closer to the city gate. As soon as the surrounding people walked forward to look at the spear, he would attack, then take advantage of the chaos to flee. After all, this city was controlled by the three great Sects, and he knew that he could not get involved in any trouble here.

Everything was quiet as the onlookers gazed at the iron spear. At first glance, it did appear to be a bit beyond ordinary. It was covered with sweeping, decorative patterns, incredibly complex, dazzling even. The more people looked at it, the more amazing it seemed.

It glowed, its tip emitting beams of light which pierced the eyes like lightning.

Even Qiao Ling, up in the Hundred Treasures Pavilion, couldn't help but gaze at it. More girls appeared around her, all of them staring down.

After looking at it for a while, the several disciples from the great Sects frowned.

"It doesn't look like anything special; there are just some fancy markings on it. It doesn't seem to have any incantations on it at all...."

The fancy young man with the fan also frowned. "That's the treasure

given to him by Patriarch Reliance?” After examining it, he laughed, then beckoned for Zhou Kai to step forward.

At this moment, the sound of footsteps could be heard from outside the East gate, drawing the attention of the surrounding Cultivators. Meng Hao’s eyes flashed, and then he frowned. Clustered outside the East gate was a group of ten or more Cultivators wearing white robes. Some of them looked familiar, and when he saw the color of their robes, he knew that these were the disciples from whatever great Sect had been holding the trial by fire.

As he saw them entering through the East gate, he realized that his path of escape was now blocked. His frown deepened, and his hand slowly lowered to his bag of holding.

The fancy young man with the fan looked at the white robed Cultivators, and his eyes gleamed. His face filled with reverence, he cupped his hands in salute and said, “Elder Brothers from the Violet Fate Sect, I am humble Sun Hua from the Winding Stream Sect. Greetings, Fellow Daoists.”

Hearing this, looks of awe appeared on the faces of the surrounding Cultivators. They followed along with the first man as he saluted the white-robed Cultivators. They were famous figures from various Sects, and normally held a high position within the State of Zhao. But to meet disciples from a truly great Sect from the Southern Domain, they were instantly lowered down. Their expressions were suddenly that of longing and courtesy.

Recently, they had all received jade slips from their respective Sects reminding them that if they ran into any white-robed disciples from the Violet Fate Sect of the Southern Domain, they were not to provoke them.

As the white-robed Cultivators entered the city, they saw the State of Zhao disciples, but completely ignored them. Hearing their identities called out caused a couple of them to frown. Their eyes swept the surroundings, then came to rest on the iron spear stuck into the ground. They stopped in their tracks.

Other disciples who were watching the scene looked astonished. Their

excited eyes flickered to stare at the State of Zhao Cultivators.

Chapter 55: Overbearing

A dark look flashed through Meng Hao's eyes. He was surrounded by disciples of various Sects from the State of Zhao, and the white-robed Cultivators were approaching from the East gate. If he aroused the attention of the various eccentrics from the three sects within the city, then his chances of getting away would be very slim.

When the disciples of the State of Zhao Sects saw the Violet Fate Sect disciples walking up, excited expressions lit their faces. To be able to make friends with them would increase their standing in their own respective Sects, and would provide great advantages in further development. Most of them had assumed the Violet Fate Sect disciples would ignore all of them, but it turned out they really were approaching them.

"Elder Brother Sun is very well known; that must be why they're coming over."

"Yeah. He's a blood relative of one of the Elders of the Watersong Sect. His Cultivation base is extraordinary. The Violet Fate Sect disciples must be coming over to give him some face." One by one, ingratiating smiles appeared on the faces of the surrounding State of Zhao disciples, especially the young man in the expensive clothes. He was growing more and more excited. Hearing the whispers of the bystanders, his heart filled with pride. It seemed he was fairly well-known after all, enough so to cause the Violet Fate Sect disciples to walk over. This matter would surely be talked about near and far, and his standing in the Sect would change immediately. His name would be known throughout the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao.

It seemed that to Meng Hao, what was happening was no big deal. He smiled, looking like he didn't care at all. As the young man in expensive clothes moved forward to greet the white-robed Cultivators, the State of Zhao disciples followed. The female disciples among them looked especially excited.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered. He pulled the iron spear out of the ground,

and then turned to leave.

“Daoist Brothers from the Violet Fate Sect, I, Sun, shall treat you to a feast in the Phoenix Heaven Restaurant,” said Sun Hua, his expression one of extreme excitement and pride. “Fellow State of Zhao disciples, please join me in receiving the brothers from the Violet Fate Sect.” The collection of Cultivators behind him made the image even more distinct. Coupled with his excited expression, it was clear that he was taking the lead among the State of Zhao disciples.

Even as the words left his mouth, and he bowed with cupped hands, the Violet Fate Sect disciples walked past him, not even looking at him. En masse, they passed the entire group without a glance, hurrying quickly forward.

Sun Hua’s mouth dropped open as he watched this happen, as did the other State of Zhao disciples who were following him.

At the same time, the person in the lead position of the Violet Fate Sect disciples let out a hearty laugh.

“Fellow Daoist, please stay,” he said. “Brother, did you just return from the treasure mountain? You have an outstanding demeanor. All of us who witnessed your actions on the mountain hold you in the highest regard. I am Qian Shuihen of the Violet Fate Sect. Greetings, Fellow Daoist, may I respectfully ask your esteemed name?”

“Fellow Daoist, we’ve been looking for you,” said another. “We never imagined that we would run into you here. Hahaha! If the Fellow Daoist has time, I will send someone to arrange a banquet. I am Lu Song of the Violet Fate Sect. Please, allow me to treat you to a feast.”

Among the ten or more Violet Fate Sect disciples, these two had the highest Cultivation bases. They were at the eighth level of Qi Condensation. Faces filled with smiles, they hurried in front of Meng Hao, blocking his way. He spoke with utmost politeness, and when they approached, they saluted with clasped hands. When the State of Zhao disciples saw this happening; their faces filled with awe and veneration.

An almost imperceptible frown appeared on Meng Hao’s face, but

quickly disappeared. He smiled, and returned a polite salute. He mumbled his name unclearly, although he knew that even though he didn't say it clearly, these people could search him easily if they wanted to.

The State of Zhao Cultivators watched on in disbelief. Their heads spun as they watched the Violet Fate Sect disciples chatting in this way to Meng Hao.

This was especially true of Sun Hua, whose face went through a series of different expressions. He was insulted, of course, and watched Meng Hao with a look of disbelief.

He knew that the white-robed Cultivators were from the Violet Fate Sect in the Southern Domain. They were proud and arrogant, considering themselves to be unmatched in the world. And yet, they were incredibly polite to Meng Hao, and their eyes were filled with veneration.

Although he wasn't quite sure what had just happened, cold sweat broke out on his forehead when he saw them being so polite. He realized that if he had made a move just now to test out the spear, he would most likely have lost a lot of face.

He wasn't the only one who was shocked. Zhou Kai looked on, dumbfounded. Originally, he had regretted calling out Meng Hao's name, but watching this scene unfold, his eyes filled with admiration.

"Elder Brother Meng really did deserve to be an Inner Sect disciple. It's a good thing I gave him those Spirit Stones back then. The Sect was dissolved, and we were kicked away like stray dogs, but he's still out stirring up trouble. And somehow he's got the disciples from one of the great Sects of the Southern Domain to treat him so well." Zhou Kai sighed inwardly.

Up in the Hundred Treasures Pavilion, Qiao Ling blinked a few times, watching in disbelief as the Violet Fate Sect disciples surrounded Meng Hao. When she saw him speaking calmly with them, she couldn't forget what had happened moments ago between her and Meng Hao. Her interest in him was piqued even more.

"Elder Brother Meng," said Qian Shuihen, shifting the conversation topic

to the spear in Meng Hao's hand. "Is this the treasured holy spear you used to rebuke the Demonic beasts on the treasure mountain?" He had looked the spear over just now, but it didn't seem to have any extraordinary qualities. And yet he clearly remembered how Meng Hao had wielded it to bloody so many Demonic beasts.

"Of course it is," said Lu Song, laughing. "Your actions on the mountain that day left me in complete veneration of you. Elder Brother Meng, there's no reason to deny it."

A strange look appeared in Meng Hao's eyes, but only for a moment. He smiled and nodded.

"Yes, this is the spear I used that day on the mountain," he said candidly.

"This spear can only be called a great treasure," said Lu Song. "I saw you use it to injure many Demonic beasts. Countless, in fact. Elder Brother Meng's mighty actions have replayed themselves constantly in my mind." He glanced at the spear, his eyes burning. Then he looked over coldly at Qian Shuihen, and the two of them locked gazes. They clearly didn't like each other, and both of them knew that the other was determined to come out on top.

When the State of Zhao Cultivators heard all of this, their gazes were drawn to the iron spear. Their original intention had been to examine this treasure of Meng Hao's. As of now, they didn't need to. If the Violet Fate Sect disciples were convinced of its power, then it must be true.

Sun Hua's eyes gleamed, and he walked forward a few steps, staring at the iron spear.

"Although, I do have to say," laughed Lu Song with a shake of his head, "Elder Brother Meng, you really threw our trial by fire into chaos. You took so many medicinal pills, Spirit Stones and magical items from the treasure mountain...." From his expression, it seemed he didn't mind.

"Oh that...." Meng Hao laughed, taking a few steps back.

"It's no matter," said Qian Shuihen, taking a few steps forward, eyes on the spear. "That treasure mountain belongs to Eccentric Song, and he shot

his mouth off, saying that anyone with the skills could take whatever they want. Actually, Elder Brother Meng's actions left me feeling immensely satisfied. But... Elder Brother Meng, regarding this spear; would you be willing to offer it up for sale? The Violet Fate Sect would be willing to offer a fair price for it!" Because Meng Hao held it in his hand, Qian Shuihen had no way to thoroughly inspect it. Because he was not at the Foundation Establishment stage, he didn't have Spiritual Sense, and therefore no way to sense the minute details.

"Well...." Meng Hao looked hesitant.

"Elder Brother Meng," said Lu Song, his eyes glittering. "This spear is really very important to us. Please, allow yourself to part with it!" He knew that the first objective was to force Meng Hao into agreeing. Then he and Qian Shuihen would have to battle it out. He took a step forward as he spoke, an overbearing air filling his eyes.

"Eccentric Song treats people wickedly and mercilessly. You took away many of his most prized treasures. If our Violet Fate Sect's Elder Wu hadn't held him back, Elder Brother Meng would be in quite a bit of danger right now." Qian Shuihen advanced further, his bearing extremely overbearing. At this point, he made no effort to conceal his power and might as he spoke.

The other Violet Fate Sect disciples slowly moved forward, forming a circle around them. Their eyes gleamed with the desire to lay hands on the spear.

"This spear is just an ordinary item," said Meng Hao, looking around at the circle of people, then turning back to Lu Song and Qian Shuihen with a frown.

"Elder Brother Meng, there's no need for jokes," said Lu Song with a laugh, his eyes moving over the haft of the spear. "I know I'm not mistaken. This is the spear that you used. That notch in the side, I saw it clearly that day."

Meng Hao stared blankly. It seemed this person had looked at the spear even more closely than he had. He hadn't notice any notch before, but

now that he looked, sure enough, there it was.

When Lu Song saw his expression, it only served to further his certainty. Though he wore a smile on his face, his eyes were cold. He wasn't allowed to kill Meng Hao to earn a spot in the Inner Sect, but could use other means, and he wouldn't hold back.

"Even if it's only an ordinary object, we still wish to buy it," said Qian Shuihen threateningly, his voice even colder than before. "We are determined to have this spear. Please, Elder Brother Meng, don't make things difficult for us, otherwise, we will be very displeased, and you will be too. You might have the spear in hand, but the Violet Fate Sect is one of the five great Sects of the Southern Domain. Even this far away, our power is greater than you can imagine, Fellow Daoist. Furthermore... it's not we who want the spear, but rather Sect Elder Wu."

Upon hearing this, the State of Zhao Cultivators all exchanged glances. Their faces lit up with sneers for Meng Hao, but they maintained their silence.

Sun Hua's smile was especially wide. Gaining the help of these people to get information about the spear was a good thing. Regardless of what happened in the end, he should be able to take advantage of the situation to make a move. Furthermore, despite Meng Hao having a treasured spear, he wouldn't dare to offend a great sect from the Southern Domain.

"If I don't agree, will you force me?" asked Meng Hao, his gaze growing grim.

"Our Sect doesn't steal treasures from people," said Lu Song with a laugh. "But Elder Brother Meng should think things through carefully. What good will it do you to offend us? Furthermore... if we really wanted to steal the spear, we could get other people to do it for us. We wouldn't have to do anything." He glanced over at the State of Zhao disciples standing a short distance away and nodded. Sun Hua and the others suddenly looked very excited.

"Elder Brother Meng, I, Qian, very much admire your performance on the treasure mountain. But let's not beat around the bush. Whether or not

you want to sell the spear, you will!” His eyes were grim, and his words cold.

Meng Hao’s heart groaned. If these people wanted to bring trouble upon themselves, he wouldn’t stop them. A variety of expressions crossed his face, and he retreated a few more steps back, muttering to himself. Then, gritting his teeth, he lifted his head. His eyes were bloodshot.

“Esteemed Violet Fate Sect disciples. If you truly wish to purchase my spear, please, name your price.” Meng Hao flicked his sleeve, stabbing the spear into the ground. His face seemed to be grim and filled with pain.

Chapter 56: Elder Brother Meng, Whether or not You Want to Trade, You Will!

When Meng Hao spoke, everything went quiet. Everyone's eyes focused on the iron spear sticking out of the ground.

Qian Shuihen laughed loudly, cupping hands in salute to Meng Hao.

"So, Elder Brother Meng is willing to part with his treasure. I, Qian, will not allow you to suffer a loss." He pulled out a bag of holding and tossed it to the ground. "Here are five hundred Spirit Stones!" Clinking sounds rang out as five-hundred Spirit Stones appeared, forming a small mountain. Off to the side, the State of Zhao disciples watched, gloating over Meng Hao's misfortune. Five hundred Spirit Stones was not a small amount, but also not a very large amount. If he sold a treasured item for that amount, he would become a laughingstock.

They weren't the only ones to think about the price. Meng Hao frowned. The difference was, his thinking was different from that of the State of Zhao disciples. In his estimation, the iron spear was probably worth two pieces of silver. To trade it for five hundred Spirit Stones meant that he was actually making a tidy profit.

"Are you kidding me?" said Lu Song. "Don't try to bully Elder Brother Meng. You think you can buy a treasure like that with just five hundred Spirit Stones? I will buy it for one thousand five hundred Spirit Stones!" With a cold harrumph and the flick of a sleeve, he produced a bag of holding. More clinking sounds rang out as one thousand five hundred shining Spirit Stones emerged, producing a pile much higher than Qian Shuihen's. It was a grand sight which left everyone nervous with anticipation.

The State of Zhao disciples' hearts pounded. To them, one thousand five hundred Spirit Stones was a lot. Even though they were disciples of the three great Sects, it would still be difficult to accumulate so many. They panted as they watched. Even Sun Hua seemed to quiver with eagerness. Zhou Kai stood behind him, dumbfounded. His admiration for Meng Hao

grew even stronger, and he felt regret in his heart. He shouldn't have called out Meng Hao's name just now. He sighed, realizing that it was his fault that Meng Hao was being forced to sell his treasure.

"Junior Brother Song really does have gall," said Qian Shuihen, giving Lu Song a cold look. He was determined to win the treasure. As far as he was concerned, it was his ticket into the Inner Sect, and he would not give up, no matter what price he had to pay. As of now, his true opponent was Lu Song. The two of them could clearly not discuss acquiring the spear together.

"All of you! Give me your Spirit Stones," said Qian Shuihen, turning to looking at the five or six disciples behind him. "When we return to the Sect I will find a way to repay you." Without hesitation, they opened their bags of holding and produced all of their Spirit Stones.

"Two thousand one hundred Spirit Stones," Qian Shuihen said coolly, looking as if he didn't care in the slightest. "Elder Brother Meng, these are all the items that I possess." He gave a cold look to Lu Song.

Lu Song's face twisted. The one thousand five hundred Spirit Stones he'd offered had been borrowed from the handful of fellow disciples behind him. Seeing how many Qian Shuihen had produced, as well as Meng Hao's apparent hesitation, he suddenly slapped his bag of holding.

"Elder Brother Meng, I have no more Spirit Stones. But, I have medicinal pills." A bottle appeared in his hand. "Here are three Heavenly Water Pills, suitable for any Cultivator of the eighth level of Qi condensation or lower. It is one of the best pills produced by the Pill Cultivation Workshop of our Violet Fate Sect. Each pill is worth five hundred Spirit Stones."

The burning look in the eyes of the State of Zhao disciples grew more intense. They knew how valuable Heavenly Water Pills were.

Sun Hua's breathing grew heavier. He had heard the Elders of his Sect speak of Heavenly Water Pills, and knew that they were one of the three most effective types of pills within the Southern Domain for eighth level Qi Condensation Cultivators. Even within the Violet Fate Sect, prominent members of the Outer Sect would have a hard time getting their hands on

one.

Qian Shuihen frowned, his eyes fixed on Lu Song. Clenching his jaw, he slapped his bag of holding and produced his own pill bottle.

“I have no Heavenly Water Pills,” said Qian Shuihen dramatically, “but, seeing that Elder Brother Meng is of the seventh level of Qi Condensation, please accept these seven Earthly Spirit Pills. They were awarded to me for meritorious service within the Sect. They are perfectly suited for the seventh level of Qi Condensation.”

“I have some piddling Earthly Spirit Pills too,” said Lu Song with a cold laugh. He looked back at the disciples behind him. They gritted their teeth and produced their bags of holding, handing over ten Earthly Spirit Pills. They looked with reddened eyes at Qian Shuihen and his group.

“Elder Brother Qian, look....” said Meng Hao shyly. His heart beat rapidly.

Qian Shuihen’s face changed as he realized that his offerings didn’t match up to Lu Song’s. But this was his opportunity to enter the Inner Sect. He would not let it pass.

“Junior Brother Lu, you are determined to have it out with me today, aren’t you? Fine!” His eyes flashing fiercely. He slapped his bag of holding, and immediately, a black beam shot out, transforming into a black spike. It glittered like lightning, producing multiple afterimages. The afterimages all came to rest on Qian Shuihen’s hand, and everything grew quiet.

It was pitch black and carried an air of indescribable sharpness.

“Elder Brother Meng, this is a magical item bestowed upon me by the Sect. It is called the Hellfighting Spike. Cold and dark, if it wounds an opponent, the wound will freeze over and a Frigid Qi will enter their body.” Qian Shuihen forced himself to ignore his heartache as he spoke.

When the spike appeared, the faces of the disciples behind Qian Shuihen filled with envy. Lu Song’s expression changed, and he looked distressed. He had never imagined that Qian Shuihen would take out the black spike.

Meng Hao's eyes widened and his heart raced even faster. It wasn't just him. A buzz of conversation arose among the nearby State of Zhao disciples.

"That's a Hellfighting Spike from the Violet Fate Sect. I've heard the Elders speak of it. Only the Violet Fate Sect possesses them. It's said there are only one hundred and eight in existence. Each one is shockingly powerful."

Sun Hua's mouth grew dry, and he stared fixated at the spike. He wished beyond anything that he could be Meng Hao, then he could have this treasure.

Lu Song's face continued to twist. Grinding his teeth angrily, he thought about the chance to join the Inner Sect, and how there was only one spot available. He would not retreat from this opportunity. Enduring the disappointment, he slapped his bag of holding and produced a treasure.

It was a feather fan, composed of a total of sixteen multi-colored feathers. As soon as it appeared, it emanated a shocking spiritual power which struck fear into the hearts of the onlookers.

"Elder Brother Meng, this is my most valuable treasure. It is a Milky Way Fan. You don't need to practice with it at all, you can use it immediately. It allows the user to soar, and can change size. The sixteen feathers can also fly out in an attack, or circle around you to form a shield. It can be used in both attack and defense. It is not a treasure of our Sect, but rather something I acquired by luck. Allow me to present it to you in trade, Fellow Daoist." An unsightly expression filled his face, and his heart fairly dripped with blood, but in contending with Qian Shuihen for a spot in the Inner Sect, he charged forth without regard to rhyme or reason.

When the fan appeared, Qian Shuihen's facial expression changed. He took two steps back, his eyes filling with lines of blood. He knew that this was an extremely valuable treasure. To offer this up was almost like risking one's life.

As for the State of Zhao disciples, they looked shocked, and their heads hummed. They might not be familiar with the fan, but it was obviously a

spectacularly extraordinary item. It emitted fierce spiritual power which left their hearts pounding in shock.

Sun Hua's eyes grew wide, and his body trembled as it filled with a fierce envy.

Meng Hao took in a deep breath. At the moment, he actually wasn't very happy, but instead apprehensive. He had already offended Eccentric Song, and the thought of deeply offending the Violet Fate Sect caused a cold sweat to break out over his entire body. But it seemed that whether or not he wanted to trade... he would have to.

His current appearance, his frown, and the dark look in his eyes, all made the onlookers think that he didn't view the treasures in front of him as valuable enough to trade.

"Elder Brother Meng, I also have a Plateau Charging Pill, useful at the ninth level of Qi Condensation." Ignoring the pain in his heart, Qian Shuihen slapped his bag of holding and produced a pill bottle. "It is very precious. Any Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation would go crazy upon seeing just one. Even though it can't compare to a Foundation Establishment Pill, it's still very valuable." As he spoke, he didn't even look at Meng Hao, but rather Lu Song.

"This spear..." Meng Hao felt even more conflicted at heart, and he was about to speak further when suddenly Lu Song raised his head to the sky and laughed loudly. He lifted up his hand and pulled a brocaded pouch out of his robe. He turned it over, and a thick, round pill fell out. It was black, and did not emit even a shred of spiritual power. But, seeing how Lu Song treated it with utmost care, it was obviously some sort of treasure.

"Elder Brother Meng, this pill is not reusable. In fact, it is a rare magical pill. When you crush it, it will turn into a hyper toxic black scorpion that can injure a Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, perhaps even kill him. This magical pill was bestowed upon me by my clan. Here, take it!" Lu Song's eyes were red, but they weren't looking at Meng Hao, but rather Qian Shuihen. He held the magical pill up in trade, but he was actually using it to threaten Qian Shuihen, as if this were the tie-breaker.

Qian Shuihen's expression changed, and his eyes flashed, filling with killing intent. But he quickly got himself under control, and then casually said, "Perhaps we should both trade for the treasure, then take it back to Elder Wu and let him decide what to do."

Lu Song didn't respond. He didn't actually want to attack. If it were in a remote place where no one could see, perhaps he would. But things were complicated with so many people watching. He had only wanted to threaten Qian Shuihen. Upon hearing the suggestion, he nodded. Even though it hurt a bit, when he looked at the Plateau Charging Pill in Qian Shuihen's hand, he could only clench his jaw and put his magical pill down in front of him.

Seeing this, Qian Shuihen relaxed a bit. Without asking Meng Hao, he grabbed the iron spear and sped off. Lu Song went with him, also holding the spear. They shot toward the city gate, each of them eyeing the other suspiciously.

The other Violet Fate Sect disciples immediately charged after them, instantly disappearing through the city gate and off into the distance. They appeared to be heading in the direction of the State Shield Mountain chain.

Meng Hao's heart raced. Without hesitation, he flicked his sleeve, collecting all of the various objects. Then he turned and sped off as fast as possible. The eyes of the disciples of the State of Zhao glittered brightly, especially Sun Hua's. His eyes filled with fervor, and he moved to pursue and attack Meng Hao. But Meng Hao waved his right hand and the fan flew out to land beneath his feet. His speed increased rapidly, and he shot off into the distance.

At the same time, the middle-aged man sitting next to the Pill furnace in the Hundred Treasures Pavilion cracked open his eyes. They flashed like lightning as he watched Meng Hao disappearing.

"These Violet Fate Sect disciples get worse and worse with each generation," he said coolly. "They are idiots. Even though they don't have the Spirit Sense of the Foundation Establishment stage, they should still be

able to tell that thing is useless.”

Upon hearing this, Qiao Ling and the other girls, who had just watched everything happen, looked incredulous.

“It’s just an iron spear,” the man said quietly. “That young member of the junior generation, surnamed Meng, he said it himself.” He closed his eyes again.

Chapter 57: Was it Worth it?

Meng Hao felt quite conflicted. He stood on the treasured fan he had just acquired, using as much spiritual power as he could muster to flee at top speed. He feared that if he was even the least bit slow, he would be attacked and robbed.

“First I offended Eccentric Song,” sighed Meng Hao, “and then the Violet Fate Sect... But it’s not my fault, they forced me to trade.” In his mind, he was innocent. At the time, he had no choice but to trade the spear.... Sighing repeatedly, he pushed himself to go faster, getting closer and closer to the State Shield Mountain range.

“I need to find a place to hide for a while. If someone catches up with me, I’ll be in great danger...” Meng Hao frowned. The power of the treasured fan faded, and he dropped to the ground, tucking the fan away and starting to run.

“When will I be able to establish my Foundation? Then I’ll be able to really fly!”

Two days passed, during which time Meng Hao didn’t rest at all. He just kept running, thinking about how he hadn’t rested at all since Shangguan Xiu began to chase him on Mount Daqing. But he had no choice. The thought of what would happen if he didn’t was too ghastly to contemplate.

Meanwhile, deep in the State Shield Mountain chain, atop the plateau next to the treasure mountain, Wu Dingqiu held up a Go piece, smiling broadly. After thinking for no less than one hour, he slowly put the piece onto the board.

Eccentric Song’s face was like iron. With a cold snort, he slammed a piece down onto the board.

“Eccentric Song, your Cultivation base is so refined. You shouldn’t allow yourself to be in such a mood.” Wu Dingqiu stroked his beard and laughed. He looked as calm as a cool wind. “Cultivators of our generation should be able to settle our Qi and calm our minds. Even with mountains crumbling around us, our expressions shouldn’t change. But look at you!

Are you really so ill-at-ease because of some nobody from the junior generation?”

“If our positions were switched, you would be the same,” said Eccentric Song sourly.

“Absolutely not! If I, Wu, were in this position, I would only offer praise, and would certainly not feel anger. In the Violet Fate Sect, we cultivate our disposition, and would not allow something like this to arouse our anger. No offense, Eccentric Song, but as far as this type of cultivation goes, you really have something to learn from the Violet Fate Sect.” Wu Dingqiu laughed, obviously quite pleased with himself.

“How about this,” he continued. “After we finish this game of chess, you can come with me to the Violet Fate Sect. I will allow you to peruse our Moral Cultivation Manual, and then you will understand what it means to settle the Qi and calm the mind.” Wu Dingqiu’s smile was so wide that wrinkles appeared on his face.

Eccentric Song harrumphed, refusing to respond and simply looking off into the distance. Wu Dingqiu’s smile grew stronger, and he too looked off into the distance. Shortly, two figures could be seen racing toward them through the forest. It was Qian Shuihen and Lu Song. They gripped an iron spear between the two of them as they made a beeline for the plateau. They were followed by a small group of other Violet Fate Sect disciples.

Qian Shuihen and Lu Song stepped foot onto the plateau and both began to speak at the same time.

“Greetings, Elder Wu. Disciple has accomplished the task. I have acquired the treasured item through trade.”

“Greetings, Elder Wu, fortunately, I have not failed in my mission. I was able to trade for the spear.”

Eccentric Song’s face was grim as Wu Dingqiu’s laughter rang out.

“Excellent. Good job, you two.” He laughed. “I will take it upon myself to promote both of you to the Inner Sect. You didn’t cause any problems for that kid, did you?”

“I am pleased to report that we made a fair trade,” said Qian Shuihen hastily. Next to him, Lu Song nodded fervently, looking excited. “We didn’t cause any problems for him.”

“Eccentric Song, come, let’s take a look at this treasured, divine spear.” Wu Dingqiu laughed. He flicked his sleeve, and the iron spear flew toward him.

The instant it touched his hand, Wu Dingqiu’s expression changed. His eyes flashed as he examined the spear closer. Grim-faced Eccentric Song also took a close look, whereupon, his eyes began to shine. He stared open mouthed, then suddenly smiled.

Wu Dingqiu’s expression grew more and more unsightly. No matter from which aspect he looked at the spear, it was ordinary in nature. Refusing to believe that it was true, he pointed the spear at a random Demonic beast further down the mountain. The creature didn’t even notice.

The expression on his face was unsightly to the extreme. He slowly raised his head, looking coldly at Qian Shuihen and Lu Song.

When they saw the look in Wu Dingqiu’s eyes, their excitement faded, and they began to tremble. Blank expressions filled their eyes.

“What did you trade for this spear?” asked Wu Dingqiu, one word at a time.

Looking nervous, Qian Shuihen said, “Disciple gave two thousand Spirit Stones, seven Earthly Spirit Pills, one of the Sect’s Hellfighting Spikes, and... and a Plateau Charging Pill.”

Wu Dingqiu’s face grew dark.

Next, Lu Song spoke: “Disciple gave one thousand, five hundred Spirit Stones, three Heavenly Spirit Pills, a treasured fan, and a magical pill.”

Eccentric Song burst out laughing. It was the laughter of release, as if all of his pent up depression from the past few days had suddenly disappeared.

Wu Dingqiu was mad enough, but when he heard the price the two disciples had paid, along with Eccentric Song's peals of laughter, his rage exploded. He suddenly let out a furious roar. "Good-for-nothing fools! This iron spear is a fake!"

It echoed out like thunder, shattering the chess board. Cracks appeared on the surface of the mountain beneath his feet. Qian Shuihen and Lu Song tumbled to the ground, blood spraying out of their mouths. Their heads spun as Wu Dingqiu's single word echoed in their hearts.

"Fake..." They were stunned.

This word thundered out in all directions along with his roar, filling nearly half of the entire State Shield Mountain range and reaching even Eastern Refinement City.

It eventually reached the ears of Sun Hua, filling him with confusion. After a moment, his expression changed, and a look of shock filled his face.

"The spear was a fake?" He looked at his companions, and looks of realization appeared on their faces as well.

"It couldn't be that the iron spear that was a fake, could it...?"

Inside the Hundred Treasures Pavilion, Qiao Ling was in the midst of introducing a magical item to a Cultivator when she heard the noise outside. Amazed, she thought back to Meng Hao's iron spear, and a strange look appeared on her face.

Next to the pill furnace, the middle-aged man opened his eyes, and they flickered with a mocking expression. Without a word, he closed them again.

Far away from the plateau in the State Shield Mountains, Meng Hao lowered his head and ran even faster.

Eccentric Song's splitting laughter undulated throughout the mountains. Wu Dingqiu's face couldn't look more horrible. He, an Elder of the Violet Fate Sect, had been hoodwinked by a Cultivator of the Qi Condensation stage. Even though it didn't directly involve him, he would definitely lose

face when word spread.

He wanted to track Meng Hao down immediately. He turned to look at Qian Shuihen and Lu Song, who stood there terrified. He was disgusted, but in his heart he sighed. These disciples had spent all their days within the Sect, and didn't have any experience dealing with outsiders. They were flowers raised indoors, inexperienced and incapable of dealing with schemes.

With a cold harrumph, he tossed the iron spear to the ground and took a few steps forward, casting his senses about in search of Meng Hao. But then, Eccentric Song stepped forward to block his way, laughing complacently.

"Fellow Daoist Wu, please don't lose your temper," he said. "Your Violet Fate Sect stresses the need to settle the Qi and calm the mind, to cultivating one's disposition. Don't allow a small matter like this to arouse your ire. When it comes to this type of cultivation, you should really do a bit more research into your Sect's Moral Cultivation Manual." Eccentric Song laughed heartily. Earlier, he had been prevented from leaving no matter what he said, so of course now he would do the same thing to Wu Dingqiu.

"You..." Wu Dingqiu's face grew dark, and he stared fixedly at Eccentric Song. But he didn't say anything.

"You broke the chessboard, so now we can't finish," said Eccentric Song with a smile. "How about this: You were going to take me to your Violet Fate Sect, right? Well, let's go! We can chat and play chess for a few months." The depression had faded completely from his heart. Seeing Wu Dingqiu like this made him incredibly happy. As far as the treasures Meng Hao had taken, he didn't care anymore. What was most important to him was the look of outrage and insult on Wu Dingqiu's face.

He pulled at Wu Dingqiu, clearly having no intention of allowing him to resist.

Wu Dingqiu's heart was filled with gloom. He glared at Eccentric Song, then let out a long sigh. He knew that the man wouldn't let him pursue

Meng Hao. He stamped his foot angrily, then allowed Eccentric Song to pull him up into the air.

“You useless imbeciles won’t be able to keep up,” said Wu Dingqiu, looking down at trembling Qian Shuihen and Lu Song. “The Inner Sect promotion is a failure. Return to the Sect and immediately go into secluded meditation!” The other disciples watched on, pale-faced.

“Damn you, Meng Hao,” said Lu Song, lowering his head, his face twisted with rage. “I will never forget this, you shameless bastard!” He ground his teeth when he recalled Meng Hao’s bashful expression, and it looked as if his eyes might erupt with flames. He had never met anyone so impudent in his entire life. The spear was obviously a fake. His face filled with pain when he thought of how much he had paid for it. When he thought about the lost chance to enter the Inner Sect, he was so angry that he almost spat up blood.

“Shameless! Despicable!” said Qian Shuihen, thinking about his precious items. He picked up the iron spear. “Meng Hao, you are a complete scoundrel!” As he thought about the failure of the Inner Sect promotion, he really seemed about to go crazy. And then he thought about all the medicinal pills and magical items, and his hatred for Meng Hao ascended to skies.

The two of them looked at each other, sharing a look of pain.

“We will place this spear up inside the Sect to remind us that we must kill Meng Hao!”

Fierce killing intent filled their eyes, and yet, the trial by fire was over, and they were required to return to the Sect. Their rancor and murderous thoughts could only be concealed in their hearts, never to be erased.

Meanwhile, Meng Hao was both scared witless and also felt that he was being accused wrongly. Sighing, he increased his speed, running as fast as he could for seven days straight. Eventually he found an Immortal’s cave in the deep mountains. Exhausted, he sat down cross-legged and began to meditate and do Tu Na breathing exercises.

“Was it worth it...?” he sighed to himself. He was tired from the days of

running, but had simply been too frightened of being caught. Now, he was on his last legs.

Two days later at dawn, he opened his eyes and began running again. For half a month, he didn't dare to let anyone see him. Finally, deep in the remote mountains, when he felt it was safe, he used a flying sword to carve out a cave, then sealed himself inside to meditate.

Chapter 58: This is not its World

Two months passed. Meng Hao sat cross-legged in the Immortal's Cave in the deep mountains. Suddenly, a thunderous noise rang out, sending the nearby animals scattering. The large stone slab he had sliced out to seal the cave suddenly shattered into pieces.

Stone fragments showered out in all directions as Meng Hao emerged from the Immortal's Cave. His hair hung down like a cloak around his scholar's robe. His eyes glittered like lightning, and a shocking Qi emanated from him, as well as a pleasant, fragrant aroma.

A look of joy filled his face. After having been in secluded meditation for such a long time, he let out a laugh which echoed out and sent the wild beasts running.

"The eighth level of Qi Condensation!" he said, his fists clenched. His eyes shone, which would have been even more obvious were it nighttime.

The two months of meditation had begun with a sense of nervousness and imminent danger. Those feelings disappeared slowly as he practiced Cultivation. He used over ten thousand Spirit Stones to duplicate medicinal pills, which he used in his meditation.

He did not want to be in a position of danger ever again. He needed to become strong, so that he could surpass the people who threatened him.

"I need to become powerful. There is no other reason. I must become powerful!"

He stood outside of the Immortal's cave, breathing the fresh mountain air, his eyes filled with resolve.

He was a simple scholar, a student of Confucianism. But the past three years had caused him to become a bit more inwardly focused. After everything that he had experienced, his personality was very different than it had been. His stubbornness was now much more obvious.

He had been stubborn in his refusal to give up even after failing in the Imperial examinations. He had been stubborn in his struggles in the

Reliance Sect. He had been stubborn when he stood up to Wang Tengfei. And now he was stubborn in his hopes for the future.

Becoming powerful is much the same as becoming rich. It is a dream that does not require a reason. If a reason is required, perhaps it is fear of being poor or weak. That is what Meng Hao believed.

“Life is an ever-burning flame, filled with exuberance. In life, one must be strong, and never lower one’s head.” He looked up into the sky, thinking about the Reliance Sect. He thought about the arrogant conceit of the experts from the State of Zhao. He thought of the coldness of the people who had tried to kill him. He thought of the gaze of that middle-aged Dao Protector who had stood next to Wang Tengfei that night.

“My mother and father disappeared when I was young. If I hadn’t struggled to improve myself, I wouldn’t have lived down to this day. Instead, I would have resigned myself to the hopelessness. If I hadn’t struggled to grow stronger during my time in the Reliance Sect, I would never have become a member of the Inner Sect. Stubborn insistence on self-improvement. That is my path into the future.” He let out a very long breath. Then, he lifted his hand and flicked his sleeve. A black beam appeared which solidified into a black spike. Emanating a black glow, it shot toward a nearby boulder.

A boom rang out, and the boulder, which was over six meters high, collapsed into chunks, interspersed with pieces of black ice. They fell to the ground, emanating a Frigid Qi.

With a look of satisfaction, Meng Hao waved his hand, and the black spike flew back to him. He moved his hand again, and this time a multicolored beam swirled around him. The sixteen-feathered fan appeared, flying back and forth as it followed the movements of his fingers. Suddenly, there was bang as the feathers separated.

Sixteen beams of light circled around. The sixteen feathers had become like flying swords, swift and fierce. They followed the movements of his hand, moving to spin rapidly around him, making an impenetrable shield, empowered by his spiritual power.

Then the feathers re-formed into a fan and settled onto his hand.

“It’s too bad I didn’t have enough Spirit Stones. The copper mirror really eats them up. Duplicating one Earthly Spirit Pill required one hundred Spirit Stones. Not a bad price. The Heavenly Spirit Pill, useful upon reaching the eighth level of Qi Condensation, required five hundred. Just a bit too expensive...” Thinking about Spirit Stones, he frowned. Of the ten thousand Spirit Pills he’d had, not many were left. During the two months he had spent breaking through from the seventh level to the eighth level, he had consumed over eighty Earthly Spirit Pills. That was nearly two per day before he had broken through to the eighth level of Qi Condensation.

“In the future,” he muttered to himself. “I will require even more spiritual power to practice Cultivation.” A glance inside his bag of holding confirmed that he only had five Heavenly Spirit Pills. He had already consumed one, and had calculated that to reach the ninth level of Qi Condensation he would need roughly one hundred and fifty.

“I know I need a lot of spiritual power. But could it be that my excessive consumption of Demonic cores has caused my body to begin to reject medicinal pills?” He hesitated, unsure of how to confirm his theory. If he was right, then he might need even more Heavenly Spirit Pills, or perhaps other types of medicinal pills.

“One hundred and fifty Heavenly Spirit Pills... that’s equal to seventy thousand Spirit Stones... Without them, it will take me a long time to accumulate that much spiritual energy. Plus, my latent talent is only ordinary, so that means it will take even longer...” He sighed as he thought about the emptiness of his bag of holding.

He had three more of the extraordinarily large Spirit Stones, but he didn’t dare to use them. The more advanced he became in his cultivation, the more he realized how rash he had been to duplicate the wooden sword all those years ago. The large Spirit Stones were clearly extraordinarily special, otherwise he would not have been able to duplicate the Vorpall Jade Blood Crystals.

“I won’t use these large Spirit Stones unless it’s absolutely necessary,” he

said resolutely. "Maybe they will have some other use in the future." The fan beneath his feet began to shine brightly, and his body transformed into a ray of light which shot off into the distance.

He was quiet as he travelled, circulating his spiritual energy. Eventually, the treasured fan began to fade and take on a more ordinary appearance. As he moved farther and farther away, he began to grow more at ease.

"After all these months, the Violet Fate Sect disciples will surely have moved on." He was careful as he traveled, eventually emerging from the mountains. He looked off into the distance. If he was right, this area was close to the capital city of the State of Zhao.

Once upon a time, he had yearned day and night to go to the capital city. This desire was second only to his dream of visiting the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands. He sighed emotionally as he thought of his three years of examinations, and three years of failures. He had never even made it to the final examinations in the capital city. Another three years had passed, and now he finally arrived, not as a scholar, but as a Cultivator.

As he approached the capital city, he stopped gliding and began to walk along the public road. He tied up his hair and this, coupled with his scholar's robe, made him look just like the old scholar that he used to be. Although, while he had then been somewhat short, after years of Cultivation, he was now tall and slender. His skin was still a bit dark, yet vigorous, emanating a strong air.

He walked along absentmindedly. It was March now, which was often a time for snowfall in the State of Zhao. As Meng Hao walked, the darkness of evening began to settle around him, and snowflakes began to slowly fall.

Soon, the ground was covered with whiteness, like a feathered quilt.

The wind blew snow onto Meng Hao's hair. It didn't melt, but rather began to collect together.

Everything was still and quiet. As he grew closer and closer to the capital city, a carriage approached from behind him, speeding forward at top speed. It seemed whoever was inside was afraid the city gates would be

closing soon.

It passed Meng Hao, kicking up billows of snowflakes in its wake. As it passed, the wind blew open the carriage's curtain just a crack, revealing a young scholar reading some texts.

Meng Hao looked at him calmly, recalling his own similar appearance years ago. As of now, Meng Hao was clearly about twenty years old. However, inside, he felt much older.

He let out a light sigh. Up ahead, the carriage came to a stop, and the curtain lifted up. The young scholar looked back at him, then stepped down out of the carriage and saluted Meng Hao with clasped hands.

"Brother, are you going to Capital City for the Imperial examinations?"

Meng Hao quickly returned the salute. "Years ago I dreamed of doing so, but those dreams have long since faded. I just want to go take a look at the Tower of Tang."

"That's a pity, my Brother," he said, looking regretful. "Your bearing seems very refined, I thought perhaps we were fellow candidates. Are you sure you wish to give up on your aspirations to become an official?" The young man appeared to be about the same age as Meng Hao.

Meng Hao shook his head silently.

"Well, never mind," said the young scholar. He looked at Meng Hao's scholarly appearance and smiled warmly. "It's starting to snow harder, and it will be harder and harder to travel along the road. If it gets too late, you won't be able to enter the city. Brother, why don't you join me in the carriage? We should still have enough time to make it to the city."

Meng Hao looked up at the sky, then back at the scholar. He bowed respectfully, then stepped up into the carriage.

A fire crackled in a small oven inside, dispelling the bitter cold. This, coupled with the fact that an old family retainer drove the carriage, made it clear that the scholar came from a rich family.

The old driver wore a wide bamboo hat and the knuckles of his hands

were large. It seemed he could do some kung fu.

“I am Zheng Yong,” the scholar said with a smile, warming his hands. “Brother, there’s no need to be shy. We’re both scholars, and scholars should help each other whenever possible.”

“I am Meng Hao,” he said with a humble smile. “Many thanks to you, Brother Zheng.” His gaze fell upon the book resting next to Zheng Yong. It was the Book of Rites. It looked very old, and was obviously not a copy, but rather an ancient original text.

“You’re surnamed Meng?” said Zheng Yong, his expression brightening. It was somewhat cramped inside the carriage, but he still managed to stand and give Meng Hao a respectful salute. “Such an honorable family name. So you’re a descendant of Qingfu! I have been disrespectful; please forgive me, Brother Meng.”

Meng Hao stood and returned the salute. “There’s no need to act like this, Brother Zheng. It’s just a surname. My ancestors were resplendent, but as for me, I failed repeatedly in the Imperial examinations, which has left me extremely ashamed.” The two of them sat back down.

“Brother Meng, you spoke incorrectly just now,” said Zheng Yong solemnly. “Your surname will bring you luck. It has been passed down to you from ancient times. As a descendant of Qingfu, even if you didn’t pass the Imperial examinations, as long as you have kindness and virtue in your heart, you can still live by the values of Confucius.”

Meng Hao thought silently for a moment, then lifted his head and looked at the scholar sitting in front of him. “Brother Zheng,” he said quietly, “what is the true meaning of Confucianism?”

“Courtesy, benevolence, loyalty, and the golden mean,” he responded unhesitatingly. “This is Confucianism.”

Meng Hao didn’t respond. He looked out through the curtain at the snowflakes filling the air. After a while, he spoke again in a cool voice: “What is the meaning of life?”

“Life?” said Zheng Yong, looking surprised. He hesitated for a while, not

saying anything.

The inside the carriage grew quiet, filled only with the sound of falling snow, which drifted in through the window. Meng Hao lifted up his hand and reached outside. Snowflakes gradually accumulated on his hand.

“Snow will only appear during winter,” he said quietly, “and can only exist in the cold wind. Therefore, its life exists only during the depths of winter.” He pulled his hand back into the carriage and held it next to the copper oven. The snow began to melt, turning into water, which flowed through the creases of his palm.

“Snow can only live in the winter. When it nears a fire, it dies. That is its life. It may yearn for summer, but... it can only desire it. In my hand, the snow becomes water, because this is not its world....” He raised his hand back up and brushed the water off outside the window. There, beyond the vision of the young scholar, it once again became snow.

Zheng Yong stared mutely, a deep look appearing in his eyes. Eventually, the carriage entered the city.

“Thank you for allowing me to accompany you, Brother Zheng,” said Meng Hao coolly. “I shall take my leave.” He saluted politely, and stepped out of the carriage, then treaded across the snow-filled street.

“Yearning for summer,” Zheng Yong murmured to himself, “but only able to exist in the cold of winter. Only able to look off into the distance... that is snow.” He watched Meng Hao disappearing into the distance. After a while, he got out of the cart and gave a deep bow in Meng Hao’s direction.

Snow began to cover him, but he knew that as soon as he reentered the carriage, it would die. He would never forget what had just happened, and what he had just seen and heard. Years later, after he became a famous Confucian in the State of Zhao, he would think back to that windy, winter night when the snow slowly melted into water. And he would think of a scholar named Meng Hao.

Chapter 59: Unable to see Chang'an

The State of Zhao was in the southern part of the Southern Domain, which was connected to the Western subcontinent. These two areas were separated from the rest of the Nanshan Continent by the Milky Way Sea, although it is possible that long ago, the Nanshan Continent had not been split in this way.

To state things more clearly, the State of Zhao exists on the edge of the Southern Domain, far from the sea. Only by passing over numerous mountains would the boundless Milky Way Sea become visible.

The State of Zhao was not very large, nor was it heavily populated. However, the capital city was a bustling place. Even though the evening air was filled with falling snow, the houses glowed with lantern light, keeping everyone warm inside.

Anyone who didn't own a house, who walked about in the snowy night, would feel an indescribable loneliness.

Meng Hao walked down the street beneath the darkening sky. The crowds of people who would normally be visible during the day were nowhere to be seen. Anyone who moved about wore wide bamboo hats, and kept their heads lowered as they hurried along.

Looking off into the distance, Meng Hao could just barely make out the shape of a large, prominent building. It was a pagoda, a tower.

The Tower of Tang.

It was nearly one hundred meters tall, almost like a mountain, capable of capturing the attention of anyone within the city. Snow surrounded it, but could not hide the evidence of the devoted care spent by the King of Zhao, the scholars, and the many other people who had constructed it.

It faced the Eastern Lands, the Great Tang and Chang'an.

Meng Hao had never been to the capital city before, nor the Tower of Tang. He had never even seen it before. But as he walked down the street toward it, he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that... this was definitely

the Tower of Tang.

He had always imagined that one day he would become a government official, and then he would be able to climb to its top and stare out across the land.

He looked at the Tower of Tang sitting there amidst the swirling snow. A long time passed.

“Before mother and father disappeared,” he murmured to himself, “a violet wind blew outside. People said it was an auspicious sign, and that a celestial being had appeared in the sky....” He walked forward, staring at the Tower of Tang.

He thought about everything that had happened that night. He would never be able to forget. That night, he lost his youth. From that night on, he would never again have a father and mother to rely on. That was when he began to grow strong.

It was then that he started to dream of going to the Eastern Lands, to the Great Tang!

Rumors spread that his parents were dead, but Meng Hao knew that they were simply missing. They were out there, somewhere. He would never forget the violet robe his father had been wearing that night as he stood next to the window, looking out at the violet wind. Nor would he forget how his father had looked back at him, a disturbed look in his eyes.

He would never forget that night, nor the quiet sound of his mother weeping.

He had never spoken of these things to anyone, but had kept them buried deep in his heart.

As the Tower of Tang grew closer and closer, he wondered why he was suddenly thinking about such things from the past. He sighed. The sigh broke to pieces in the snowy wind. It would never leave the capital city, nor the State of Zhao, nor the Southern Domain. It would not cross the Milky Way Sea, nor would it reach Chang'an.

“Maybe it’s because mother would always talk about the Great Tang,” he

murmured. "She told me that in the capital city of every country, there is a Tower of Tang, and people say those towers are the closest you can get to Chang'an without actually being there."

As he approached the district surrounding the Tower of Tang, he looked up.

The snow fell in heavy sheets, and winter wind whimpered around him. More and more snow was building up on the tower. From where he stood, he could see clearly that it had been constructed with great care. Its foundation was eight-sided, and it rose up like a massive pagoda.

It was constructed from green material, and looked just like he had imagined it would.

Despite the snow, soldiers patrolled around its perimeter. This area... was a place only highly ranked officials and powerful people could enter, in order to offer sacrifices and perform rites.

But the mortal soldiers didn't notice as Meng Hao's body passed by and entered the tower.

An ancient flight of stairs wound up inside, reaching slowly up toward the top. The walls were carved with brightly colored frescos, depicting the Eastern Lands, the Great Tang and Chang'an.

"I remember mother describing the Great Tang to me. I was so small then, that I didn't really understand what she was talking about. But now that I think about it, the way she described the Eastern Lands, the Great Tang and Chang'an... it was as if she had seen them with her own eyes. If she hadn't, how could she have described everything in such detail? It was just like these carvings." He examined them as he ascended the stairs. Eventually he reached the top of the tower, and the end of the carvings. They had depicted life and culture, beautiful scenery, and countless amazing, legendary stories. It was all very moving and inspiring.

Outside, the snow whistled about in the air, buffeted by strong winds. It lay thick on the top of the tower. Meng Hao took a deep breath and looked off into the distance. The only thing he could see was snow. He could not see the Eastern Lands, nor the Great Tang, nor Chang'an.

“So you can’t see Chang’an from here after all,” he murmured quietly. He stood there quietly, wrapped up in countless thoughts. He was not a government official, here to offer sacrifices to the heavens. He was a Cultivator, a Cultivator of the eighth level of Qi Condensation.

“I walk a different path than before, but the direction is the same.” The wind blew his hair about, and the snow stuck to him un-melting, as if it approved of his life, as if he too, were snow.

After a while, he sat down cross-legged and began to meditate quietly.

During the night, the snow fell even harder. The lights shone within the houses of the capital city. From atop the Tower of the Tang, everything grew pitch black and quiet. Within the quiet darkness, Meng Hao could see himself years ago, back in Yunjie County, amidst the snow.

The snowy night slowly passed.

At dawn, Meng Hao opened his eyes. It was hard to say whether he glanced at the rising sun, or if the rising sun glanced at him first.

The city came to life with the dawn. Soon, the streets filled with throngs of people. Meng Hao watched the mortal world spread out before him.

He observed silently, all the way until night fell. Another dawn broke. One day, two days, three days.

For seven days, Meng Hao gazed down on everything. At first, his eyes had seemed faint and weak, but then they grew bright, and finally, calm.

Something had changed in his mind. He had achieved a state of enlightenment regarding life itself. At dawn on the eighth day, he looked down to see officials and soldiers arrive at the Tower of Tang to perform a rite. A middle-aged man stood there wearing a golden robe. Behind him were crowds of people, standing neatly in formation. He offered sacrifices to heaven and earth, as did many of the commoners throughout the city.

Meng Hao stood as they began to bow to the heavens. He left the tower, avoiding their obeisance. Stepping onto the treasured fan, he soared forward, knowing that the time had come for him to leave. As he prepared to depart, he looked back toward the tower one more time.

When he did, his eyes grew wide.

He watched as the people kowtowed outside of the Tower of Tang, which then began to glow softly. It was a sparkling glow that the mortals could not see, but someone filled with spiritual energy could.

The light shot upwards, sending the clouds roiling, whereupon a huge vortex appeared. This, also, was invisible to the eyes of the mortals, but not to Meng Hao. He could see the vortex clearly, and it caused him to suck in a breath. He looked shaken.

Inside the vortex, he could see... an endless field of bones and ruins, filled with a ghastly aura and a curling, black fog. He couldn't see very many clear details, but could sense a mysterious and gruesome air roiling out.

His mind was shaken, especially when he noticed that within the black mist of the vortex was an enormous coffin. There, amidst the ruins, sitting cross-legged next to the coffin, was a shrivelled corpse. It suddenly opened its eyes. They were as gray as ash, and within them seven faint spots of light rotated about like stars. The corpse's vision shot out from within the vortex, straight onto Meng Hao.

His heart trembled, and he involuntarily closed his eyes as he felt a stab of pain within them. It felt as if seven stars were about to appear within his own pupils, the same as those within the ash-gray eyes.

Suddenly, withered wrinkles began appear across his body, and a terrible black mist began to seep out of his pores.

Shocked, Meng Hao retreated at top speed. At the same time, the vortex was suddenly sucked up into the clouds. The crushing feeling he had experienced vanished, and everything went back to normal. It was as if what he had just seen had been a hallucination.

And yet, his body was still withered, and faint wisps of Death Qi continued to seep out of him. His facial expression changed several times. He looked down at the Tower of Tang. The glow was no longer present, but the people continued to pay obeisance. His face grew dark, and without hesitation he pushed the treasured fan to its limits. His body

turned into a stream of light and he disappeared into the distance.

He soared out of the capital city, looking back toward the Tower of Tang several times. His eyes scanned the sky, and doubt began to rise up in his heart.

“It couldn’t have been a hallucination. The Tower of Tang... what kind of place is it exactly? Originally I thought it was a mortal place, but that’s obviously not true! What was that place within the vortex...? The ruins, the Death Qi, all those bones...” His scalp grew numb as he thought about the corpse he had seen amidst the ruins.

Its eyes had been filled with callousness, grim and ghastly, especially the seven stars within the pupils of its gray eyes. As he thought of this, his body grew cold and began to drip with sweat.

“And that... coffin.” Meng Hao took a deep breath, his eyes filled with fear.

“Who is inside that coffin, and why did it suddenly appear within the vortex. Why...? Does it have something to do with the Tower of Tang...? Does it have something to do with the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands?” Meng Hao grew thoughtful, looking back yet again at the Tower of the Tang. The sense of awe within him grew stronger. He breathed in deeply again, gliding forward a bit before dropping to the ground and running.

He was starting to think that being stared at by the corpse within the vortex... had been a catastrophe....

Chapter 60: Undispellable Death Qi

The capital city drew further and further away. A long time passed, during which time Meng Hao pushed down the feeling of fear that quivered in his heart. He frowned, scanning his body. It had withered; while before he had been somewhat slim, he was now somewhat emaciated.

That problem was secondary to what really alarmed Meng Hao. His body continuously emanated strands of black mist, as if it were burning. It continued to come out of him, no matter how much he tried to wave it away. It floated high up into the air, making it possible for anyone around to determine his location.

“My body stopped withering, but this weird black Qi just won’t stop. It’s really making me stand out too much....” He flew forward as fast as possible, trying to find a place to hide within the mountains. After the black mist finished dissipating, he would come out again.

Two hours later, he sat angrily in the remote mountains. After sealing himself up in an Immortal’s Cave, he’d found out that the black mist could pass through some material objects.

“Dammit, how long will this mist last?” He gnashed his teeth, not daring to stop anywhere. If he did, the mist would gather together above him and become easily visible. Anyone who saw it would definitely think there was some sort of treasured item nearby.

Meng Hao frowned, pushing deeper into the mountains. He kept moving forward as fast as possible. When his spiritual energy ran out, he would consume a medicinal pill. It was only in this fashion that he could prevent the black Qi from gathering together. It wasn’t as easy to see when it was spread thin, although it still floated up visibly into the sky.

Seven days passed. Meng Hao was frightened as well as exhausted, having had no chance to rest. The damnable mist was black during the day, then glowed white during the night.

After the seventh day, he could tell that the amount of mist dissipating

from his body had grown weaker. In his best estimation, it would take approximately one month for it to disperse completely.

He didn't dare to stay in the mountains for too long, as he might attract attention. He wasn't sure whether or not the Violet Fate Sect disciples had actually left. So, he had no choice but to just keep moving forward.

On one particular day, he sat cross-legged on the treasured fan, soaring through a forest. Suddenly, he lifted his head up, his eyes flickering. He could see four shapes speeding in his direction from a distance away.

With a frown, he stopped flying and dropped to the ground. He slapped his bag of holding and a flying sword appeared. It shot toward an old tree, chopping a hole in it into which Meng Hao entered.

He had attempted this method before and found that the mist would not pass outside of the tree. However, after the space of about ten breaths, the tree would wither up.

He had done this several times in the past week in order to avoid the detection of other Cultivators.

Sitting inside the hole in the tree, he waited for the four people to go away. Unfortunately, instead of passing by, they stopped nearby and began to look around carefully. One of them was a young man in a violet robe. His face was expressionless as he leaped to the top of a tree, the power of his Cultivation base radiating out. In his hand he held a white pearl.

The black Qi which had been emanating out from Meng Hao was instantly sucked into the white pearl, whereupon it began to turn black.

Meng Hao's heart began to thump when he saw this.

The group of people was made up of three men and one woman. The woman wore a long skirt and was rather beautiful. A mysterious look gleamed in her eyes, a look that others might describe as demonic. "Come to speak of it, it really is strange," she said. "This thick Death Qi has appeared a lot recently in the mountains."

The two men standing next to her frowned as they gazed around the forest.

“Regardless of what’s causing it, we should leave once we finish absorbing the Qi,” said one of the men, sounding a bit nervous. “Whatever is causing it is something very strange. It’s probably better if we don’t find out what it is.”

“What are you afraid of?” said the woman with a smile. She gave a charming look to the violet-robed young man, her eyes shining with charm. “With Elder Brother Yan here, we’re safe from any danger. He’s an Inner Sect disciple of the eighth level of Qi Condensation. He can prevent any disasters from occurring. And who knows, maybe we might even have a bit of good luck.”

The young man with the pearl was of the eighth level of Qi Condensation, and was obviously the leader. The others were all at the sixth level.

It didn’t take very long for the pearl to absorb all of the black Qi. The pearl itself was now pitch black, and didn’t seem as if it could even absorb any more. Meng Hao sat there watching, lost in thought.

“Let’s go,” said the man named Yan. He flicked his wide sleeve, and the four of them began to make their way off. As this happened, Meng Hao frowned. They were taking too long, and he had run out of time. The black Qi was just now beginning to seep out from the top of the tree.

As soon as it appeared, the man named Yan turned and looked at it, his eyes flashing.

Meng Hao sighed, and then burst out from within the tree. He flicked his sleeve and sped off as fast as possible.

His appearance surprised the four people, as did the black Qi emanating from him. The man named Yan stared at him.

“Fellow Daoist, please stay behind a moment,” he called out. His hands flashed in incantation signs, and instantly, a black wind sprang up which formed into the shape of a hideous, grinning skull. It opened its jaw and shot toward Meng Hao.

He had asked for Meng Hao to stop. But this skull carried the full power

of his eighth level of Qi Condensation. It moved as swift as lightning, with incredible power.

At the same time, the two other men and the woman, their eyes glittering, attacked. Two flying swords and a jade bracelet transformed into beams of light which shot straight toward Meng Hao. The woman's jade bracelet let out a buzzing sound as it flew through the air, expanding in size as it prepared to smash him.

Meng Hao frowned. He hadn't been in a good mood before, having been frustrated to the extreme by the black Qi. At the moment, these people had arisen a strong killing spirit within him. He let out a cold snort.

His right hand lifted up, and a roaring Flame Python appeared, eight or nine meters long. It shot toward the four incoming magical items, radiating blistering heat.

A boom shook the air. The jade bracelet shattered and the two flying swords melted away. The skull dissipated because of the collision. The Flame Python let out a wail and then vanished.

"Eighth level of Qi Condensation!" said the woman. The two men next to her gasped, their expressions intent. The Cultivator surnamed Yan took a step forward, staring at Meng Hao.

"I am Yan Ziguo, disciple of the Cold Wind Sect," he said coolly, his eyes flashing like lightning. "Fellow Daoist, you don't need to be in such a hurry to leave. Could you please explain the thick Death Qi emanating from your body?" Meng Hao was at the eighth level of Qi Condensation, but so was Yan Ziguo, so he spoke in a voice as cold as ever.

Meng Hao returned his cold stare, and didn't say anything. He slapped his bag of holding, and in a flash, the treasured fan appeared. He shot away at high speed. Yan Ziguo looked at the fan in astonishment.

"A magic item which grants flight. He's not of the Foundation Establishment stage, so he can only glide. He'll be back on the ground shortly." Yan Ziguo's heart began to beat faster. The fan was a magical item that only disciples of the ninth level of Qi Condensation might get within his sect. With a cold harrumph, he charged off in pursuit. The

other three hesitated for a moment, then followed him.

“Dammit!” said Meng Hao, his eyes growing even colder. His opponent had seen the power of his Cultivation base, as well as his use of magic, both of which were clearly warnings. And yet he still pursued. Meng Hao felt extremely annoyed.

His hand moved in incantation patterns, and then he pointed back at the four pursuers. Instantly, four beams of light shot out, four of the feathers from the fan. They cut through the air like flying swords, heading straight for the four people behind him.

Yan Ziguo narrowed his eyes and smacked his bag of holding. A small wooden shield appeared, about the size of his palm. It quickly expanded to the size of a head as it flew forward to meet the feather. A violent boom sounded out as they slammed into each other.

As for the other three, looks of shock appeared on their faces and they scrambled to produce magical items. Amidst the ensuing explosions, they spat blood out from their mouths and retreated, looking terrified.

Those three feathers weren't damaged at all. Meng Hao waved his finger, and they shot back toward Yan Ziguo.

Yan Ziguo's face twisted and he opened his mouth with a howl. A green mist suddenly emitted from his pores, forming a dense fog which circulated around him, turning into a giant green skull. It flew directly toward the three incoming feathers.

Banging sounds rang out, and the skull collapsed. The three feathers no longer glowed, and were now twisted and warped. They flew back to Meng Hao.

“I'm warning you,” said Meng Hao coldly, his eyes flashing, “if you keep pestering me....” Without finishing his sentence, he turned and disappeared into the distance, his body transforming into a prismatic beam.

Yan Ziguo didn't pursue. He glared at Meng Hao's retreating form, his hands trembling slightly within his sleeves. Meng Hao was a stranger to

him. And yet this stranger had just casually forced him to use a life-saving art.

“That fan is not just a flight-bestowing treasure, but a powerful weapon!” he said to himself, his heart pounding. He turned to look at his three bedraggled companions. “Have any of you heard of someone from the State of Zhao who is at the eighth level of Qi Condensation and has a treasured fan?”

“Someone so young who is at the eighth level of Qi Condensation would surely have made a name for himself here,” said one of the other Cold Wind Sect disciples. “But I can’t think of anyone among the three great Sects who matches his description.”

“Who is he? He can’t be a Cultivator from the State of Zhao, can he?” Yan Ziguo frowned, even more interested in Meng Hao’s treasured fan.

“Elder Brother Yan,” said the female disciple, sounding hesitant. “I remember someone mentioned a treasured fan about a month ago. It was Elder Brother Sun Hua from the Winding Stream Sect. He said that some disciples from the Southern Domain’s Violet Fate Sect made a trade with a Reliance Sect disciple named Meng Hao. One of the items was a feather fan.”

Yan Ziguo looked shocked. He slapped his bag of holding, and a jade slip appeared in his hand. This was an item distributed to Inner Sect disciples. Inside was a depiction of Meng Hao, sealed with orders that anyone encountering him were to feel him out to get an idea of how strong he was.

The orders were several months old, so Yan Ziguo had mostly forgotten about them. Scanning the jade slip, he looked closely at the picture of Meng Hao’s face and, sure enough, it was the same as the person he had just encountered.

“So it’s him!” said Yan Ziguo, his eyes gleaming. His mouth twisted into a cold smile. He was just about to say something when suddenly, the ground trembled and the sky above turned crimson. Something shocking was happening not too far away in the Southern Domain, and the side-

effects were spreading out to cover the entire area.

Chapter 61: A Shocking Event in the Southern Domain

An earth-shaking boom rumbled out from the heavens.

The source of the sound wasn't close, but seemed to billow forth from quite some distance. It wasn't directed toward the location of Meng Hao and the others, but rather seemed to cover the entire State of Zhao. At this moment, every Cultivator within the country could hear the massive roar.

A red glow appeared, so large that it was impossible to tell how much area it covered. It seemed as if the entire sky was crimson. No one knew what was happening.

Far away from the State of Zhao and the eyes of its Cultivators, in the middle of the Southern Domain, an enormous rift had appeared in the sky.

It was a Heavenly Rift!

The booming grew more intense, rolling across not just the State of Zhao but the entire Southern Domain. Every place, every Sect, every Clan in the massive Southern Domain eventually heard it.

Meng Hao's face changed. He was shocked to see the Black Qi roiling out from his body at an increased rate of speed. He moved forward even faster, his body turning into an iridescent streak of light.

Yan Ziguo and the others were awestruck. Their hearts began to race, and their Cultivation bases suddenly seemed unstable, as if they were about to fly out of their bodies.

At this moment within the mountains of the State of Zhao, a thick mist swirled around the Cold Wind Sect, one of the three great Sects. When the roaring boom sounded out, the mist began to seethe and the mountain peaks trembled. Within the Sect, hundreds of pale-faced disciples stared up into the heavens in shock.

On a mountain behind the Sect, its two strongest members, both Elders at the Core Formation stage, awoke and emerged from a secret chamber.

They flew out and hovered in the air, looking up into the sky and gasping. Their Cultivation bases rotated rapidly. Even though they couldn't see exactly what was happening so far away, they could feel an enormous, shattering pressure from the Heavens. And then, because of their extraordinary Cultivation bases, they were able to sense the Heavens splitting.

“What happened? The noise is coming from the center of the Southern Domain. Impossible! That's such an incredible distance away, how can a sound travel so far?!”

Five of the Cold Wind Sect's Foundation Establishment Elders flew up behind them in succession. Their faces were pale and their bodies trembled.

Within another of the State of Zhao's three great Sects, the Upright Evening Sect, two Eccentrics of the Core Formation stage and four Elders of the Foundation Establishment stage floated in mid-air, gazing numbly toward the distant Heavens. The entire sky was crimson, as if it were on fire. Seeing this left them in shock.

“What... is this...?”

It wasn't just the members of the Cold Wind Sect and the Upright Evening Sect. The disciples of the Winding Stream Sect also heard the sound and stared dumbly up into the heavens, looking awestruck. The Sect's Core Formation Eccentric was trembling. His Cultivation base was profound, and yet he stared off into the distance, wondering what was happening. Even more shocking, amidst the burning screen which covered the entire sky, there suddenly appeared what looked like countless fissures.

“This is not a normal sound, otherwise it wouldn't transmit so quickly across the State of Zhao. Its speed... this sound could exterminate everything!”

The situation in Sects in other surrounding countries was the same as that of the State of Zhao. Far away in the Southern Domain, the Patriarchs of the five great Sects and three great Clans, with their profound

Cultivation bases, also felt the enormous pressure bearing down from the Heavens. Being in the center of the Southern Domain, they could see what all those other could not.

They saw the enormous rift in the sky. Disbelief covered their faces.

On this day, at this moment, the entire Southern Domain was in an uproar. Countless Cultivators flew into the air, and an innumerable amount of experts looked up in amazement. This strange sign which had appeared in the air shocked them all to the core.

Meng Hao flew along as quickly as he could; more black Qi than usual was pouring out of him, as if it were answering a summons. This, combined with the strange sign in the sky, had him scared nearly witless. He shot forward at full speed until he arrived at the top of a tall mountain. He stood there, looking off into the Heavens.

Far away, it seemed as if the Heavens were slowly being split open. Then, a dark glow spread out, filling heaven and earth both with pitch-black darkness.

A moment passed, and then the entire Southern Domain began to quake, as if a powerful force were shaking its very center, sending tremors rippling outward. Mountains crumbled and the land was rocked.

The Southern Domain was very large, so it took time for the effects to spread. It started in the center and then spread out in every direction, all the way to the borders. Mountains continued to collapse, but because the State of Zhao was so far away, the reaction there was not as strong. It only experienced minor earthquakes about seven days later.

Even that left the Eccentrics of the State of Zhao shocked. Some of them had been to the central district in the Southern Domain and knew how incredibly far away it was. Even a massive earthquake there would not have been able to travel seven days away to the State of Zhao.

Within those seven days, a rumor spread like wildfire through the Southern Domain. Soon, everyone had heard the shocking tale.

A corpse had fallen from the sky!

And it had fallen roughly a thousand kilometers from one of the three most dangerous locations in the Southern Domain, the Rebirth Cave!

The news caused a huge sensation in the Southern Domain and sent everyone into a commotion. It was even said that experts from the Western Desert were gathering in the Southern domain because of it.

“Which expert did that corpse belong to? It fell down from the Heavens. It’s said... you can only step foot into the Heavens after achieving Immortality! Could it be that the roar which echoed out was emitted by that corpse before it died?!”

“Achieve Immortality? It’s easy to use those words, but according to the ancient records, only seven or eight people in the Southern Domain have ever done it. But that corpse... it was just too astonishing. When it hit the ground, it caused seven days of earthquakes.

“Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment, Core Formation and Nascent Soul, Spirit Severing and Seeking the Dao, finally Immortal Ascension. A total of seven stages to ascend to Immortality. To achieve Immortality and conquer emptiness is difficult, difficult. Oh so difficult!”

This news spread through the Southern Domain. However, the State of Zhao was a somewhat remote place, so the rumors didn’t reach there. Only a few Elders from the great Sects learned of the information.

As for Meng Hao, he continued to move through the deep mountains, a frown on his face. During the seven-day period, the Death Qi in his body had been reduced significantly. But then it had started to seep out again like before. He estimated that it would take about twenty more days for it to dissipate.

“This Death Qi is very annoying. If it weren’t for it, I could be out accomplishing things.” Meng Hao’s mood was one of vexation. Because of the inexplicable event seven days ago, all the Cultivators in the State of Zhao had been aroused, forcing Meng Hao to hide himself constantly. He had even been found out a few times and put into dangerous situations.

Each time he had to think of some way to extricate himself. He didn’t like killing, but lately he had felt killing intent more and more often.

“This won’t do. If I’m forced to kill someone, it will cause even more problems. It’s much better to just hide.” He thought for a bit, then suddenly looked up. There ahead of him in the multitudinous mountains, everything was quiet. Meng Hao stopped and looked around, but didn’t see any clues as to why everything was so peaceful.

He had a bad feeling, though. He frowned, slapping his bag of holding to produce the treasured fan. He shot forward through the forest.

There was a banging sound, along with a wind that sent leaves rustling throughout the area. Then, everything was still again, without the slightest trace of anything strange. Meng Hao’s facial expression, however, changed. The event from seven days ago had been shocking, but, things had calmed down since then, and none of the wildlife in the area had died. The boom that had sounded out just now should have sent the animals fleeing, and yet, everything was calm.

Without hesitating, Meng Hao sent the treasured fan shooting forward, this time, in a different direction. Just then, a cold snort sounded out, and from the peaks of several surrounding mountains, black beams shot forth. The beams of blackness connected, enveloping the entire area, like a seal.

Meng Hao was within the sealing area, although he wasn’t at the center, but rather toward the edge. If he had not been cautious just now, and had instead continued on forward, he would have been smack dab in its middle.

Eight figures appeared, their bodies blurs. Soon, the group became visible. Meng Hao saw a strange, water-like shield which he had been unable to sense before, that had been hiding them just now.

Eight people: six men and two women. One of the women wore a long white dress, and her face was pale. In her hands she held an aqua-blue pearl. The pearl emitted waves of water-like ripples which had served to conceal her presence. Except, the pearl was covered with cracks; it appeared to be a single-use treasure.

She didn’t approach him, but rather stayed off in the distance. The others approached him at top speed, surrounding him. One of them was

Yan Ziguo.

Meng Hao's face grew dark as he looked around coldly at the group of Cultivators. A killing air swirled around Yan Ziguo, but his Cultivation base was not the highest among the group. The highest belonged to someone who wasn't even standing on the ground. Floating in the air on a flying sword above Meng Hao, was a middle-aged man wearing a sky-blue Daoist robe. His eyes were calm, but he emitted an air of supreme condescension.

His cultivation base was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation!

Among the Sects of the State of Zhao, people at the ninth level of Qi Condensation were in a unique position. If within a sixty-year cycle they could successfully establish their Foundation, then they would become Sect Elders. If they could not establish a Foundation within a sixty-year cycle, then they would no longer be members of the Inner Sect, but rather an Honor Guard.

If Shangguan Xiu had been a member of the Reliance Sect when it was powerful, then he would have been an Honor Guard and not an Elder.

The middle-aged man had only been at the ninth level of Qi Condensation for about two years. You could say that his future was limitless. If he succeeded in establishing his Foundation, he would have a completely different identity.

"You're clever," said Yan Ziguo coldly. "If you weren't, you wouldn't have been able to swindle the Violet Fate Sect. But even though you're not in the center, once you're in the perimeter of this spell, you're dead. After all, Elder Brother Liu is here, and we're going to take the real treasure from you. When we do, maybe we'll leave your corpse intact." He looked greedily at Meng Hao's treasured fan. In the past days, he found out a lot about Meng Hao, including the details of his trade with the Violet Sect disciples, which he had learned from Sun Hua. Now he coveted Meng Hao's items even more.

Meng Hao, his face grim, didn't even look at Yan Ziguo. Instead, he stared at the ninth level Qi Condensation Cultivator.

This was the Elder Brother Liu that Yan Ziguo had mentioned. He looked ordinary, and didn't speak; instead, he just stood there on his flying sword, emanating a powerful Qi. When Meng Hao sensed his strength, his pupils constricted.

"If you want Meng Hao's treasures," he said coldly, "then you will have to pay the price." He slapped his bag of holding and a silver light shot out. A glittering silver spear appeared in Meng Hao's hand. He planted it in the middle the treasured fan next to him, its point straight up.

As soon as the silver spear appeared, it caught the attention of the onlookers. Even Elder Brother Liu's eyes flickered, coming to rest on the spear.

In the same moment as their eyes focused on the spear, Meng Hao, eyes glittering, flung open his scroll painting. Howling sounds poured out from within the painting, and three mist-beasts appeared. They charged forth toward the group of people.

Taking advantage of the sudden chaos, Meng Hao quickly flashed an incantation pattern, and a black beam shot out at indescribable speed. Yan Ziguo's heart leapt, and he ripped himself out of the shimmering glow caused by the magical item behind him, shooting backwards at the same time. Before he could barely even move, the black light sunk into his head, right between his eyebrows.

This was the Hellfighting Spike!

And this was Meng Hao's temperament. Not attacking was fine. But when attacking, one must be the first to strike! Yan Ziguo was looking to die, so Meng Hao would send him to the netherworld!

Chapter 62: One Wave Settles Down

As soon as the Hellfighting Spike touched the space between Yan Ziguo's eyebrows, a black frost began to spread out rapidly. In the blink of an eye, it had covered his entire body. A cracking sound could be heard, and Yan Ziguo's eyes widened. His pupils shrank, and an astonished expression filled his face. Then, his entire body shattered into chunks of black, frozen flesh, which then fell to the ground.

Originally, Meng Hao had wanted to flee. But Yan Ziguo had arranged for his escape routes to be blocked. Therefore, Meng Hao made the decision to strike him down.

He had been a part of the Cultivation world for a while now, and was well aware of the law of the jungle. Not attacking was fine, but when the time came to attack, it should be without a shred of compassion; otherwise, it meant your own death.

This sudden turn of events instantly caused expressions of shock and horror to appear on the faces of the surrounding Cold Wind Sect disciples. The three mist beasts that had emerged from Meng Hao's scroll painting were almost upon them, howling savagely.

Their appearance was fierce, and their roars enveloped the area with a powerful pressure. They looked like three conglomerations of black mist as they charged directly toward the Cultivators, then smashed into them.

A boom resounded out, and an expression of shock appeared on the face of Elder Brother Liu, the Cultivator of the ninth level Qi Condensation. He slapped his hands together and then waved them forward; a red banner flew out. It rippled in the air, causing a massive flame conflagration to shoot out, over ten meters in every direction. The flames shot toward the mist beasts.

Meng Hao ignored the other Cultivation Monks, who were in complete disorder. He moved downward, charging straight toward the woman with the aqua-blue pearl. He could tell that the pearl was the magical item maintaining the special spell.

Her face suddenly filled with anxiety, and she retreated backwards rapidly. But Meng Hao was faster than her; he was upon her in an instant. He waved his hand, sending her spinning, blood spraying from her mouth. Terrified, she released the pearl, which went flying away.

The woman might be beautiful, but her presence here made her Meng Hao's enemy. He looked at her coldly, then raised up his hand with a claw-like gesture. The pearl shot toward him and landed in his hand.

Almost as soon as it touched him, a thunderous roar could be heard. The three mist beasts were completely destroyed as Elder Brother Liu's flame conflagration encompassed them. It then spread out toward Meng Hao.

"You might have a lot of treasures," said Elder Brother Liu with an unsightly expression, "but you killed members of my Cold Wind Sect. You're dead!" His fellow disciples behind him looked to be in very poor condition. But that was of secondary importance. He would have a hard time explaining the death of Yan Ziguo when he returned to the Sect. He made no attempt to conceal his intention to murder Meng Hao.

Meng Hao said nothing. As the flame conflagration descended towards him, his left hand slapped his bag of holding and a large, black net appeared. He flicked it out, and it shot up into the sky. It passed through the flame conflagration, extinguishing it instantly. The net expanded, growing larger and larger, making a beeline for Elder Brother Liu.

Elder Brother Liu's face twisted. He lifted his right hand, which contained a jade slip that he snapped. Suddenly, his body blurred as he just barely ducked out of the path of the net. Behind, two of the other disciples were caught up by the net. The net radiated an intense heat, which instantly set their clothing aflame. Within a moment, their charred bodies began to be sliced into pieces.

Horrifying shrieks rang out, causing the remaining Cold Wind Sect disciples' faces to grow pale. They trembled with fear. Even Elder Brother Liu looked on with wide eyes. He would never have been able to guess that Meng Hao would have magical items such as this.

Even while all of this was happening, Meng Hao continued to move, his

right hand grabbing the pearl and smashing it. The giant sealing spell that covered the area flickered and then began to disperse. Meng Hao's left hand flickered in an incantation pattern which he aimed at the treasured fan. He grabbed the silver spear as the fan's sixteen feathers circulated around him to form a shield, which then carried him forward, shooting toward a hole in the unravelling spell.

"You want to run? Stop dreaming!" Elder Brother Liu jabbed the spot between his eyebrows, whereupon a sword aura emerged from his mouth. A small, translucent flying sword appeared, the size of a pinky finger. A glittering sword aura billowed out as it shot in pursuit of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao was moving fast and seemed just about to make his escape. He waved his hand behind him, and the black net made loud, reverberating noise. The two Cultivators who had been caught up in it were now cut completely into pieces. The net began to roll up, dragging their bags of holding along with it as it flew back into Meng Hao's sleeve.

By this time, Elder Brother Liu's glowing, crystalline sword had almost reached Meng Hao. It was just about to stab into him when he sensed the imminent danger. He was not in the position to stand up to the power of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Seeing the fierceness of the sword aura, Meng Hao's eyes flashed. The sixteen feathers rolled together and then became sixteen swords which shot toward Elder Brother Liu's crystalline sword.

A thunderous boom rolled out. Eight of the sixteen feathers were destroyed, and the crystalline sword was sent spinning. The remaining eight feathers returned to form a fan beneath Meng Hao's feet. However, the fan was clearly slower than before.

"With fewer feathers, your fan just won't be fast enough!" said Elder Brother Liu with a savage laugh. And yet, even as the words were coming out of his mouth, his eyes widened. Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding, whereupon eight more identical feathers appeared. The treasured fan was once again whole, and Meng Hao transformed into a blur of light as he shot into the distance.

“Dammit!” Elder Brother Liu’s killing intent grew even stronger. He raced off in pursuit. Seeing this, the remaining disciples had little choice but to follow. Gnashing their teeth, they produced their magical items and ran after him.

Only the female disciple, whose Cultivation base was not strong enough, hesitated and did not follow.

Meng Hao stood on his fan, his face grim, the Death Qi still emanating from his body. He took out the two bags of holding he had just acquired and looked them over. The magical items and medicinal pills inside were of little value to him. But, he did find three white pearls, items that he definitely needed.

He took one out, and it instantly began to suck in the Death Qi. In the space of about ten breaths, it had become completely black and unable to absorb any more.

Meng Hao frowned, looking at the pearl for a moment before dropping it.

“I can’t do any duplication at the moment. Once I shake off these people, then I can make some copies of the pearl. That will take care of the problem of the Death Qi attracting people’s attention.” He looked behind him to see figurative thunder brewing. A glittering glow surrounded the Cold Wind Sect’s Elder Brother Liu as he soared after Meng Hao in pursuit. Behind him, on the ground, three figures could be seen, racing along at breakneck speed.

“Those three people are nothing,” muttered Meng Hao to himself. “Killing them won’t be a problem. But that guy surnamed Liu is at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. He also has a lot of magical items. In our short battle just now, he didn’t even use any magic. Getting wrapped up in a fight with him wouldn’t be good....” A sneer appeared on his face. Even if Elder Brother Liu was of the ninth level, he couldn’t possibly have as many medicinal pills as Meng Hao. He would just keep running until the other party was exhausted.

His plan settled in his mind, he slapped his bag of holding and retrieved

three Earthly Spirit Pills, which he popped into his mouth. He felt a bit of regret.

“I wasted eight duplicated feathers, and now I have to waste medicinal pills. If I keep fighting like this, I’m going to become poorer and poorer. I also forgot to grab Yan Ziguo’s bag of holding. I need to be more careful in the future.” He felt a little depressed. The Earthly Spirit Pills infused into his body, filling him with boundless spiritual energy. His speed increased.

Time passed, and soon it was dusk. Meng Hao sped along at top speed the entire time. Sometimes he would soar on the treasure fan, other times he would race along on foot. Elder Brother Liu was behind him the entire time, laughing grimly. Meng Hao was much more experienced now. Even though gliding via flying sword was not as fast as the treasured fan, he was still completely at ease.

Far behind him, the three Cold Wind Sect disciples who had been pulled into the chase were currently moaning and groaning. They didn’t dare give up, though, for fear of arousing Elder Brother Liu’s displeasure.

Meng Hao sped along as dusk fell. Suddenly, his expression grew intent. The Death Qi which continuously emitted from his body was now floating off into the distance. His heart began to thump. He looked off in that direction and suddenly saw a beam of prismatic light screaming through the air. Behind it were ten or more figures racing along on foot.

The beam of light turned out to be two people. Both were about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, and were at the eighth level of Qi Condensation. Each one stood on a green jade flute, over half a meter long. Their eyes flashed like lightning, especially one of them, who wore a red robe. From the power emanating from his Cultivation base, he was clearly just a hair away from entering the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

Among the people following them on foot was Sun Hua. He carried a pearl in his hand, which was currently absorbing the Death Qi.

“So, you’re still in the State of Zhao, Meng Hao!” said Sun Hua with a loud laugh. He stared greedily at Meng Hao. “Elder Brother Zhou, Elder Brother Xu, this is Meng Hao. He has the treasure of Patriarch Reliance.

Even the Violet Fate Sect is interested in it! He tricked them and aroused their ire. He definitely still has the treasured item with him!” He palpitated with eagerness as he thought about the treasured item that Meng Hao possessed. He had been dreaming of getting his hands on it ever since he’d witnessed what happened that day.

Fortunately, he had run into Elder Sister Han of the Cold Wind Sect a few days before. During an intimate moment, he’d been able to coax some information out of her regarding Meng Hao. Then, he’d immediately found some Elder Brothers from the Sect and begun to use the Death Qi absorbing pearl to track down Meng Hao.

When they appeared and caught sight of the Elder Brother Liu chasing Meng Hao like thunder, murder on his face, their expressions changed in rapid succession.

Sun Hua’s eyes flickered, and the two soaring in the air, Zhou and Xu, let out cold snorts. They moved to block Meng Hao’s way, fingers flashing in incantation patterns. The flutes beneath their feet began to emit ghastly, shrieking sounds, accompanied by thin wisps of mist. The mist transformed into a gigantic hand which shot toward Meng Hao.

“Beat it!” said Meng Hao, his eyes flashing. He raised his right hand, and instantly, an eight or nine meter long Flame Python appeared. Radiating intense, scorching heat, it shot to meet the flying hand.

Meng Hao flicked his right sleeve, whereupon two wooden swords appeared. Glowing brightly, they became the fangs of the Flame Python as it surged forward.

Chapter 63: Another Wave Rises Up!

A boom rolled out. The giant mist hand had been created by the combined effort of two eighth-level Qi Condensation disciples from the Winding Stream Sect. Meng Hao by himself couldn't possibly stand up to it directly. This was why he had used the second most mysterious items in his bags of holding, the wooden swords. The first most mysterious item was, of course, the copper mirror.

The wooden swords, which had been the object of Wang Tengfei's desire, now flew out from Meng Hao's hand. They slashed through the giant mist hand and proceeded toward the two Winding Stream Sect disciples.

The swords didn't emit a powerful sword aura, but as they flew through the air, they sucked in the surrounding spiritual energy in a roiling current. Shocked, the two Winding Stream Sect disciples evaded immediately. Without so much as a cold snort, Meng Hao shot off into the distance.

The wooden swords circled back to him. He didn't even look back, just increased his speed forward.

Behind him, Elder Brother Liu's eyes narrowed, and the avarice in his eyes grew even stronger.

"This Meng character has way too many magical items. Those wooden swords are incredibly mysterious. It just goes to prove that the spear the Violet Fate Sect was after is incredibly extraordinary! But why hasn't he used its power yet?" Elder Brother Liu's eyes flickered as he continued in pursuit. Similar to Meng Hao, he did not have the ability to sustain long-term flight, but needed magical assistance to soar.

Sun Hua and the other Winding Stream Sect disciples had dark looks on their faces. This was especially true of Zhou and Xu. With cold harrumphs, they shot off in pursuit. Sun Hua clenched his jaw and followed them. Zhou and Xu transformed into multicolored streaks of light as they shot off in mid-air. They kept their distance from the Cold

Wind Sect's Elder Brother Liu, but continued in pursuit of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao had a grim expression on his face. He knew that Elder Brother Liu from the Cold Wind Sect had not even really made a move yet. With the appearance of Sun Hua and the others, he now had two waves of Cultivators to deal with. He frowned.

"I just don't have enough Spirit Stones," thought Meng Hao somberly. "If I had enough, I could have duplicated a Heavenly Spirit Pill and broken through to the ninth layer of Qi Condensation... If I were at the ninth level, these people wouldn't dare to pursue me.

"It seems I might have to go sell some of my treasures after all..." Meng Hao had thought of using the copper mirror to duplicate some of the magical items, then selling them. But the State of Zhao was small, and only had a few Sects. If he started selling magical items, then later used an identical magical item, it would arouse suspicion.

As he muttered to himself, conflicted, his eyes suddenly filled with determination. He dropped to the ground and began running, swallowing some Earthly Spirit Pills until his body was filled with plentiful spiritual power. Then, he jumped back onto the treasured fan and shot onward. Unfortunately, there were many mountains in this area, but few demonic beasts. The ones that he did see were weak, making it impossible for him to use his usual tactic to evade pursuit.

As he was trying to figure out what to do, the two Winding Stream Sect Disciples, Zhou and Xu, suddenly made incantation patterns. Another whistling sound rang out from the flutes beneath their feet.

It sounded out like a wailing spirit, circling around the two of them as their fingers flickered.

"Heavenly Thunder Spirit!"

As the words rang out, a fierce wind sprung up around Meng Hao, and black clouds appeared in the air. Lightning began to crackle within the clouds, then shot toward Meng Hao.

A look of shock appeared on his face, as this was the first time he had

dealt with a lightning bolt attack such as this. He stamped his foot down onto the treasured fan, and immediately, ten feathers flew up, overlapping across each other. The lightning bolt slammed into them.

A thunderous sound rolled out, sending the feathers spinning. The lightning bolt had been created by the combined effort of two Qi Condensation Cultivators. Although it didn't contain the power of heaven and earth, it was not weak, and as far as Meng Hao was concerned, was actually quite powerful.

His face drained of blood, he looked back, killing intent flickering in his eyes. The attack had not been strong enough to cause him to spit up blood, but at the moment, his spiritual energy was unstable.

"An excellent Heavenly Thunder Spirit," said Elder Brother Liu coolly, his eyes flashing. "The Winding Stream Sect's lightning bolt magic is very refined. Sadly, your Cultivation base isn't high enough. Even with your combined efforts, the result is this. Were you stronger, he would be injured if not dead." Despite his talk, he didn't make any move on Meng Hao. Having fought with him already, he knew that he had a multitude of magical items. He'd decided that the best thing to do would be to rely on his own profound Cultivation base to exhaust his opponent, then attack.

He was happy to see the others attack him, forcing Meng Hao to use up his spiritual power.

"We haven't finished with the magical technique," said the Winding Stream Sect disciple surnamed Xu. "Don't shoot your mouth off so much, Liu Daoyun!" Exchanging a glance, the partners each swallowed a medicinal pill and then began making incantation patterns, their fingers moving in unison.

Immediately, the black cloud roiling in pursuit of Meng Hao began to churn. Again, lightning began to form. A massive roar rumbled out across the land, and again the feathers from the treasured fan moved to defend. This time, the lightning didn't end. Bolt after bolt struck, booming ceaselessly.

In the blink of an eye, three bolts had struck, causing Meng Hao to spit

up a mouthful of blood, and the killing intent in his eyes to solidify. He flicked his right sleeve, and the scroll painting appeared. He poured his spiritual power into it and two roars could be heard. Mist seethed, and two mist beasts sprung from the scroll painting, shooting toward Zhou and Xu.

The two men grew pale. They had already consumed medicinal pills to perform their magical art, which was the only technique they had. Even with their combined effort, they could only keep it going for so long. They were discussing this as the fourth lightning bolt struck, which was when the mist beasts emerged from Meng Hao's scroll painting.

These mist beasts had the appearance of wolves. Heads twisting with fierce howls, they charged the two men, black ripples spreading out from underneath their paws as they ran.

Liu Daoyun stared at Meng Hao with flashing eyes. He lifted his right hand, and at the exact moment that Meng Hao unfurled the scroll painting, and the lightning bolt was about to fall, he bit his tongue and spit out some blood. His fingers flickered, causing the blood to circle around his hand. His face began to glow red. He waved the finger at Meng Hao.

“Qi Condensation, Cold Wind Finger!”

The finger attack came without warning. The red blood suddenly became black and began to emit a Frigid Qi. In the blink of an eye, it had transformed into a finger made of ice crystal. This in turn transformed into a prismatic beam which shot directly toward Meng Hao. In an instant, it was within about three meters of him.

The finger attack was cunning and powerful. As it approached, the mist beasts from the scroll painting collided with Zhou and Xu. Above Meng Hao, the fourth lightning bolt began to descend.

Meng Hao felt a sense of critical danger in his heart. A grim smile appeared on Liu Daoyun's face, and he advanced a pace. Beneath him, a glittering light could be seen as his crystalline sword shot toward Meng Hao.

“Let's see you dodge his time,” he said, watching with flashing eyes. “You

can't! You must produce your silver spear and show us its might. I'm really looking forward to seeing it!"

Meng Hao's pupil's constricted. There was no time to pull out another magical item, so he released the scroll painting to float at his side. It was a critical juncture, with no time even to think. He stamped his right foot down onto the treasured fan. It instantly disassembled, the sixteen feathers transforming into a rain. Ten of them shot toward the crystalline sword, with six remaining behind to defend against the lightning bolt.

To deal with the incoming Cold Wind Finger, Meng Hao dropped toward the ground and then extended his right hand upward. A flame python eight or nine meters in length shot out from the center of his palm, rushing to intercept the Cold Wind Finger. At the same time, his left hand flashed an incantation, then waved forward. A Wind Blade emerged, lending its power to the Flame Python, which grew even larger as it shot toward the Cold Wind Finger.

All of this takes some time to describe, but in actuality it happened in the time it takes for a spark to fly up from a piece of flint. A massive boom rang out as the lightning slammed into the six feathers. It was weakened, but it still hit Meng Hao, causing him to vomit up a mouthful of blood.

At the same time, the crystalline sword collided with the ten feathers. A series of explosions could be heard as the feathers were shattered. The sword aura continued on, stabbing through Meng Hao. He coughed up more blood, his body trembling.

Next was the most powerful attack of all, the Cold Wind Finger. Once a lost art, it had been improved to allow Cultivators of the Qi Condensation level to use it. Currently, it could only be used by someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

A boom resounded out. The disparity between the Cultivation base levels was immediately apparent. Despite the considerable combined might of the Flame Python and the Wind Blade, they were still torn to pieces. They managed to destroy about half of the black colored Cold Wind Finger. The rest of it continued on through, stabbing into Meng

Hao's chest. He coughed up even more blood, which instantly turned black and congealed into chunks of ice. His body spun backwards.

Frigid Qi filled his body, making him feel as if he were about to freeze. He knew that this was a critical moment. His right hand shot out, and the elusive Hellfighting Spike emerged, along with two banners, which coiled around his body.

Currently, Meng Hao was seriously injured, but hadn't lost his will to fight back. He gritted his teeth and made to flee. But then something happened that no one had expected, neither the fleeing Meng Hao, nor Liu Daoyun, nor the currently bedraggled Zhou and Xu from the Winding Stream Sect. Suddenly, a third party arrived to join the fight!

An arrow shot forth from the distance, accompanied by a shrill, piercing scream. It flew directly toward Meng Hao, filled with intense killing intent. It clearly was meant to pierce his heart and kill him.

It moved with incredible speed toward him. He suddenly felt a stabbing pain in his chest, whereupon he let out a roar. The two hovering banners moved to block the arrow. An explosion rang out as the banners were shattered. As the arrow continued forward, Meng Hao waved his right hand, sending the Hellfighting spike, which he had originally wanted to use to counterattack, to intercept the arrow.

There was a boom, and Meng Hao spit out more blood. He watched as the black spike disintegrated. The arrow slowed some, but continued on toward him.

He retreated, dropping toward the ground, but finding no place to conceal himself. Even if the few remaining unsheltered feathers caught him and carried him off, there were too few of them. He wouldn't be fast enough to evade the arrow.

Borrowing some momentum from the explosion of the Hellfighting Spike, Meng Hao took in a ragged breath. A fierce look appeared in his eyes, and he smacked his bag of holding again. A wooden sword appeared. He didn't even have time to point the sword towards the arrow. It came in so quickly that it slammed into the side of the blade.

Boom!

Chapter 64: A Massacre Cause by a Silver Spear

When the wooden sword connected with the arrow, it began to emit a droning sound. It was pushed back by the force of the arrow and smacked into Meng Hao's forehead. Blood sprayed from his mouth, as he was sent spinning backward. As for the arrow, its power was spent, and it transformed into ash, which drifted away in the wind.

As Meng Hao flew backwards, he slapped his bag of holding, and produced a Demonic Core, which he swallowed. He was running low on Earthly Spirit Pills, so he opted for the Demonic Core. His eyes were shot with blood, and his injuries were severe. This was perhaps the worst he had been hurt since becoming a Cultivator.

Thankfully, the wooden sword was truly a treasured item and hadn't been damaged at all. Actually, the reason Meng Hao had been sent flying back was because his Cultivation base wasn't high enough to completely control the sword. If it were, the arrow wouldn't have even been able to make the wooden sword move back an inch.

Meng Hao's body was wracked in pain, and his mind a bit clouded. But his innate desire to survive still existed. He bit his tongue, and used the pain to focus. He lifted his pale, bloodless face and looked off into the distance. Currently approaching was a young man in a white robe, flying on an enormous green leaf.

His face was calm, and his eyes cold, without a trace of arrogance. However, a single look at him would leave anyone without doubt that he was superior to others.

His Cultivation base was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and yet he appeared to be only twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Seeing him approach, Liu Daoyun, who was also at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, narrowed his eyes.

He instantly understood. "At his age... he must be a Chosen from a great

Sect,” he said to himself.

“White robes....” Meng Hao wiped the blood from his mouth, staring at the white-robed youth.

“I am Ding Yan from the Violet Fate Sect,” he said coolly. “I’m here to take your life, on orders from the Sect Leader.” He had been dispatched months ago to the State of Zhao to search for Meng Hao. Using his own special methods, he had finally caught his trail today. He had actually been watching for some time, waiting to make his move.

He was completely different from Qian Shuihen and Lu Song. As an Inner Sect disciple, he was frequently sent out on Sect business. He was one of the Chosen of the Violet Fate Sect, destined to establish his Foundation. When that happened, he would be a true Chosen. Handling matters outside of the Sect was simply training for him.

He was vastly more experienced than Qian Shuihen, and had even made a name for himself in the Southern Domain in the past two years. His personality was cold, his attacks ruthless. Back in the Southern Domain, he would always consider the reputation of his Sect. But here in the State of Zhao, he could be a bit less restrained.

He had attacked Meng Hao when he was in critical danger, and had never imagined that Meng Hao would actually be able to survive the lethal arrow.

Meng Hao’s face was grim. Three waves of attackers had appeared today. Two were of the eighth level of Qi Condensation, and two were of the ninth. Based on his Cultivation base alone, he couldn’t stand up to them. Furthermore, he was seriously injured. The situation was very dangerous.

Watching Ding Yan approach, Liu Daoyun’s eyes flickered, and he felt somewhat nervous. Yet his eyes were determined. He would not give up.

Zhou and Xu from the Winding Stream Sect, seemed even more hesitant. If they only had to deal with Liu Daoyun, they could do it. But now that the Violet Fate Sect had made an appearance, they were less convinced.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered faintly. His right hand slapped his bag of holding and five feathers flew out, combining with the four beneath his feet to make a nine-feathered fan. It took to flight, carrying him away at high speed.

Ding Yan's eyes were calm. He flicked his sleeve, and the giant leaf beneath his feet flashed as he shot off in pursuit. Liu Daoyun burst into motion as well. Zhou and Xun from the Winding Stream Sect gritted their teeth, then joined in the pursuit.

Sun Hua wasn't fast enough and had already been forced to drop to the ground. But, he wasn't willing to give up, so he followed as fast as possible on foot.

The three waves of people were incredibly fast, so Meng Hao swallowed another Demonic Core. The Frigid Qi within him was still very strong, and his body was covered with sword wounds which oozed blood.

He clenched his jaw and circulated his spiritual power, then slapped his bag of holding. A silver light flashed in his hand. It was none other than the silver spear!

Liu Daoyun's vision immediately became focused on it, and he slowed down a bit. Ding Yan, with his flashing eyes, as well as Zhou and Xu from the Winding Stream Sect, had never before laid eyes on the long silver spear. But Sun Hua, who was still running along on the ground, had. He immediately shouted out: "That's the silver spear! That's the treasured gift from Patriarch Reliance!!"

Hearing this, Zhou and Xu slowed down a bit, their eyes shining fiercely.

"You are all after this silver spear?" said Meng Hao. "Very well then. It requires a lot of spiritual power to use. Its true might can't even be utilized unless you are at Foundation Establishment stage. If you are powerful enough to use it, then be my guest!" His face twisted with an expression of incomparable pain, as if he were throwing everything away in an attempt to save himself, he tossed the spear away as hard as he could.

He put all the spiritual power he could muster into his arm as he flung it. The silver spear hummed, transforming into a silver-colored rainbow as

it shot off into the distance, shining so brightly that it virtually forced everyone's eyes to follow it.

The instant it flew off, Meng Hao's treasured fan transformed into a beam of light that shot off in the opposite direction.

Interestingly (whether or not it was on purpose was hard to tell) the spear just happened to fly in the direction of the three pursuing disciples from the Cold Wind Sect. When they saw the silver spear flying toward them, they gaped in shock.

Sun Hua's eyes were red, and with a hoarse shout, he changed directions, running directly toward the silver spear. Killing intent billowed from his face, he slapped his bag of holding, and a sword aura emerged. He clearly intended to kill anyone who dared to take the spear from him.

Further behind him, the ten or more Winding Stream Sect disciples raced forward even harder.

Liu Daoyun's facial expression changed as he debated to himself about whether or not the spear was real. Because he was not at the Foundation Establishment stage, he didn't have Spiritual Sense, so it was difficult to make a judgement about this matter. There was a fifty-fifty chance about it, but in his mind, it didn't matter. He couldn't just let the Winding Stream Sect disciples gang up on his fellow disciples.

If they did, and word got out, he would be severely punished when he returned to the Sect.

And if the spear was real... well, if he gave up under those circumstances his punishment would be even more severe when he returned to the Sect. He was damned if he did, damned if he didn't. He clenched his jaw.

"Dammit!" Liu Daoyun abandoned his pursuit of Meng Hao and made a beeline for the spear.

Zhou and Xu hesitated, watching as the long spear flew off, pursued by both Sun Hua and their fellow Winding Stream Sect disciples. At first, they weren't sure if they should chase after the spear, but when they saw Liu Daoyun speeding off after it, they made their decision, shooting off in the

same direction.

Only Ding Yan from the Violet Fate Sect stopped, his eyes flashing. His task was to slay Meng Hao, so he didn't care whether the treasure was real or fake. With a cold laugh, his eyes shining, he pushed his giant leaf into a beam of prismatic light, speeding after Meng Hao.

Two people, one up ahead, one behind. One fleeing as fast as he could, the other pursuing with a magical item backed by the power of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. They disappeared over the horizon.

As for Liu Daoyun, he flew quickly in the direction of the silver spear, and seemed to be on the verge of reaching it, when someone howled out from behind him.

“Heavenly Thunder Spirit!”

As soon as the sound rang out, a black cloud formed in the sky above Liu Daoyun, and the crackling of thunder could be heard as a lightning bolt struck down toward him.

His face grew dark. He slapped his bag of holding, and a Frigid Qi spread out and shot toward the lightning bolt.

The lightning bolt dissipated with a booming sound, and the Frigid Qi continued onward to enter the black thundercloud. It began to rumble, as if it were about to break apart.

“Heavenly Thunder Spirit, detonate!”

Under normal circumstances, Zhou and Xu would never do something like this. But with the silver spear in play, and the Winding Stream Sect disciples on the ground having the upper hand, they couldn't allow Liu Daoyun to enter the fray. Now that they had abandoned their pursuit of Meng Hao, they could pour all their combined power into play.

A massive explosion reverberated out as the thundercloud exploded. The force of it shot out in all directions. Zhou and Xu coughed up blood. Liu Daoyun, also injured, was not in a good position. A crystalline glow appeared in front of him as blood seeped from the corners of his mouth.

It was at this moment that the silver spear slammed into the ground. As it did, the Cold Wind disciples were about to grab. But then Sun Hua arrived, a savage look on his face. Behind him swarmed the Winding Stream Sect disciples, their faces radiating ferocity.

“This treasured item belongs to the Winding Stream Sect!” shouted Sun Hua excitedly. If he was the first person to lay hands on the spear, it might not end up belonging to him, but the Sect would definitely reward him. Perhaps he would end up having a breakthrough in this Cultivation base, and reach the eighth level!

The three Cold Wind Sect disciples were just reaching their hands up to take the spear, when they were surrounded by the ten or so others. They howled as the Winding Stream Sect disciples attacked them. They could do little more than watch as the prize which had just moments ago been theirs, was taken away.

“So brazen!” shouted Liu Daoyun, turning his head to see what was happening. His roar rumbled out, and he completely ignored Zhou and Xu. He waved his hand toward Sun Hua, and the Cold Wind Finger appeared, shooting forward as fast as lightning.

Considering the level of Sun Hua’s Cultivation base, he simply couldn’t avoid the attack. His facial expression changed into one of savagery, and he gritted his teeth. His only hope lay in the treasured item. As the Cold Wind Finger approached, he snatched up the long silver spear, brandishing it in an imposing manner.

“You’re defeated!” he shouted. Liu Daoyun’s eyes focused on the spear as it flew into the air. Zhou and Xun held their breath.

The silver spear flashed as it flew forward, making a beautiful, silver arc. The instant it met the Cold Wind Finger, a bang sounded out. It wasn’t a very loud bang. The spear broke apart, most of it shattering into dust, with only a few fragments remaining intact.

Sun Hua gaped in astonishment. It was the last astonished look he would ever give, as the Cold Wind Finger pierced into his chest. His body shuddered, and a boom rang out, louder than that emitted by the silver

spear, as he exploded.

Liu Daoyun stared in shock, as did Zhou and Xu. The Cold Wind Sect and Winding Stream Sect disciples were also dumbfounded.

Everything was suddenly quiet, except for the sound reverberating out from the attack that had killed Sun Hua.

Liu Daoyun was the first one to move again. He went forward and began to collect up the remaining fragments of silver. Zhou and Xu also approached and picked up some of the pieces.

“Silver... it’s really silver. It’s just a damned silver spear!!” Liu Daoyun’s eyes were crimson, and it seemed as if he was about to go berserk. He raised his head to the sky and let out a ferocious roar. He was humiliated, and furious. He had killed Sun Hua; had the spear actually been a treasured item, it would not have been a huge problem. But he had killed a Winding Stream Inner Sect disciple over a simple silver spear.... This could cause a huge conflagration between two great Sects.

“Meng Hao!!” He wanted to chase after him, but Meng Hao had long since disappeared. Zhou and Xu were also furious. And while they felt indignation toward Meng Hao, Sun Hua had been killed by Liu Daoyun. They couldn’t just let him go.

Chapter 65: Battle at the North Sea

An iron spear had cheated the Violet Fate Sect disciples.

A silver spear had cheated Sun Hua and Liu Daoyun, and had caused friction between two great Sects.

If Fatty's father knew about this, his eyes would definitely grow wide. The iron, silver and gold spears were crafted by his artisans.

If Fatty had a chance to hear about it, he would definitely find it incredibly amusing.

Meng Hao hadn't even known how useful the silver spear would be. The people from the Winding Stream Sect and the Cold Wind Sect had already stopped chasing him. And now, even if they wanted to pursue him, they wouldn't be able to track him down.

And yet, his face was as grim as before. He stood on the treasured fan, popping down Demonic Cores. Ding Yan pursued him on his giant leaf, his face cold. In order to kill Meng Hao, he would follow him to the ends of the earth if necessary.

If it was a simple pursuit, Meng Hao would be able to lead him around in circles, considering his vast amount of Demonic cores. But he was seriously injured, which made things difficult. The Demonic cores were just barely enough to keep him going.

He could suppress the injury for a while, but eventually he would reach the point where he couldn't. When that happened, the injury would become even more dangerous.

Even more frustrating, an occasional arrow would scream toward him from behind, forcing him to use the treasured fan to defend himself. The most dangerous position was when he reached the end of a glide and had to drop to the ground and run, decreasing his speed and agility. Thankfully, the land was mostly covered by forests, and by the time he reached the top of next mountain in his path, he would be able to jump onto the treasured fan again.

Of course, Ding Yan was also incapable of sustained flight. Just like Liu Daoyun, he also had to drop to the ground occasionally, waiting to find some favorable terrain to once again begin gliding.

“You can’t get away,” said Ding Yan with a smile, his eyes glittering. “If you give up without a fight, I can take you back to the Sect and let them deal with you.”

“There are some special circumstances regarding the matter between myself and the Violet Fate Sect,” said Meng Hao as he continued to speed forward. “Fellow Daoist Ding, do you understand what I mean?”

“I don’t need to understand,” he responded coolly, his eyes growing colder. “If I take you back to the Sect, the Sect Elders will surely punish you. The Violet Fate Sect is one of the great sects of the Southern Domain. Naturally, they will be reasonable, and discern what is true and false.”

“What happened that day was beyond my control,” Meng Hao explained. “Qiu Shuihen and Lu Song forced me to sell my item. I told them it was just an ordinary spear, but they insisted. They even threatened me! You can’t put the blame on me for that!” Having reached the top of a relatively high hill, he pulled out the treasured fan and began to glide once again.

“How could the fault not be yours?” said Ding Yan, his voice as cold as ever. He continued to move forward with great speed. “You could have broken the spear on the spot, then pulled out the real treasure. Then none of this would have happened.” He slapped his bag of holding, and a black wooden bow appeared in his hands. He pulled it back and released a screaming arrow toward Meng Hao.

There was a boom as Meng Hao used a magical item to defend himself. Coughing up blood, he laughed. The blood on his teeth made his smile even more ferocious.

“This is your so-called ‘being reasonable?’” he said. His eyes shone with killing intent, and he didn’t say anything more. Swallowing a Demonic Core, he pushed the treasured fan forward even faster.

Several hours passed. Afternoon came, then evening. Meng Hao was exhausted, but he could see that this pursuit might go on for days. He

could see from the cold eyes of the person chasing him that he was ruthlessly toying with him.

He was prey, not to be killed forthrightly, but to be toyed with. Then, even as he began to go crazy from it all, he would be felled in a single blow.

The land of the State of Zhao whizzed beneath Meng Hao and Ding Yan. Time passed. Meng Hao's Cultivation base of the eighth level of Qi Condensation was at the point that it seemed about to wither up. He continually consumed Demonic cores, but that in itself was harming his body. Even his blood seemed to reek of Demonic Qi.

To a Cultivator, this was essentially intentionally harming one's own Cultivation base. Meng Hao had never heard of this before, but based on what he was seeing, he now had a clue. And yet, he had no choice.

As for Ding Yan, he had noticed what was happening, so had intentionally slowed his pursuit. An inquisitive look had appeared in his eyes, as if he had caught sight of some interesting toy.

"I really want to see what happens when you consume so many Demonic cores that all the Qi in your body is transformed into Demonic Qi. When I kill you, will I find an eighth-level Demonic core inside?" Ding Yan laughed.

Meng Hao heard his words, and more veins of blood appeared in his eyes. His face grew somber.

He was not the type of person to speak a lot during a fight. Just now he had tried to explain himself, only to find out that his opponent didn't care. After that, he didn't say a single word. This was just like the time he had faced up against Wang Tengfei. He had not roared or howled; he had faced everything with dark silence.

He continued to flee for some time, pushing himself to the limits of his speed. Finally, up ahead, he caught sight of Mount Daqing. He had been hiding away for about half a year, and had finally come back to the mountain again, a big circle.

As he continued on, he could see a vast, mirror-like lake off in the distance. It was the North Sea.

When he saw it, his eyes suddenly lit up.

“The North Sea....”

Meng Hao thought of the little ship, the old man and the young girl, and about how the North Sea had revealed the Dao!

His gaze grew hard, and he changed his direction, aiming for the lake.

He sped along on his treasured fan. Behind him, Ding Yan sneered. He had quite enjoyed forcing his quarry to continuously consume Demonic cores.

“I’m not sure why this guy has so many Demonic cores, but it doesn’t matter. I’ll force him to tell me before he dies. In any case, I really want to see what his body looks like after he eats too many.” He smiled, stamping down on his giant leaf and continuing on in pursuit.

The two of them continued on for a while, until suddenly a booming sound rang out in the air. Just as they flew out over the surface of the North Sea, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding, then tossed out the black net.

It immediately grew out to a diameter of approximately three meters and shot toward Ding Yan. Ding Yan immediately flicked his wide sleeve, and a violet-colored jade slip flew out, which transformed into a violet whirlwind. The whirlwind sent the net spinning. Its connection with Meng Hao seemed to have been severed, and it flew off into the distance.

“Using a useless treasure like that shows how incompetent you are,” said Ding Yan coldly. The net appeared to be extraordinary, so he had used the jade slip just now. He’d never imagined that it would be defeated in one move.

Meng Hao’s eyes flashed. He bit down on his tongue and then spit out some blood. His face was even paler than before. As he moved across the surface of the North Sea, the water began to ripple as if a fierce wind were blowing across it. Its calmness had been broken.

The treasured fan stopped when he reached the center of the lake. It was the first time since Ding Yan had begun chasing him that he came to a full stop. He turned around, slapping his bag of holding, and the scroll painting appeared in his hands. His eyes glittered, emanating killing intent.

He would flee no longer. He would fight with Ding Yan, Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation!

Meng Hao was not in the upper hand, but he would fight. He had to fight. He couldn't carry on much longer, so if he didn't fight, he would die. There was only one option... fight!

"So, you're not running anymore," said Ding Yan as he approached. A sneer appeared on his face when he saw the look of murder in Meng Hao's eyes. He waved his finger, and instantly a violet light appeared in front of him which transformed in a bird. It flapped its wings as it shot toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's eyes flashed. The instant the violet-colored bird appeared, the scroll painting trembled, and the sounds of roaring beasts could be heard. Meng Hao went all in with his Cultivation base. Perhaps because of the vast quantities of Demonic power within his spiritual energy, the roars of the beasts were particularly frightening. Four streams of mist appeared, solidifying into four Demonic beasts which charged toward the violet-colored bird.

At the same time, Meng Hao took a step forward. The treasured fan beneath his feet disassembled, the feathers circulating around him and then shooting toward Ding Yan like flying swords.

Meng Hao didn't retreat. A flying sword appeared beneath his feet to support him, and he himself shot toward Ding Yan.

"You overestimate yourself," said Ding Yan with a cold laugh, his eyes filled with ridicule. His right hand flickered in incantation patterns and then he pressed down on the spot between his eyebrows. A vortex emerged, accompanied by a roaring sound.

"Violet Fate Aura!"

Dense Violet Qi poured out from within the vortex, instantly transforming into a violet-colored ring, which expanded, and then flew toward Meng Hao.

Thunderous sounds continued to reverberate, causing the feathers around Meng Hao to crumble and collapse. As the massive sound roared out, it caused him to vomit up blood. And yet, stubbornness filled his eyes. He slapped his bag of holding, and roughly one hundred flying swords emerged, shooting toward Ding Yan.

The Sword Rain screamed forth, filling the sky. The light from the sword auras filled the sky. The swords reached Ding Yan in an instant, and yet his sneer grew thicker.

“So reckless,” he said, slapping his bag of holding. A red beam emerged, transforming into a red-colored whisk. He twirled the whisk, and a screaming red gust of wind appeared which cracked the nearly one hundred flying swords. Many of them simply shattered.

The wind gust smacked into Meng Hao, and he coughed up more blood. But then, within the fragments of the hundred flying swords, appeared two wooden swords. They flew out, piercing through the red wind and shooting toward Ding Yan.

Ding Yan’s eyes narrowed. His fingers flashed in incantation signs as he shot backwards.

Meng Hao lifted his right hand into the air, his face radiating killing intent.

His finger pointed up, and suddenly the black net which had been spinning away moments ago, expanded to a size of ten meters, then dropped down with incredible speed.

All of this takes quite a bit of time to describe, but all happened in the space of just a moment. Ding Yan’s expression changed instantaneously. Before he could react, the huge net had caught him up. The two wooden swords shot toward him, and it seemed they would stab into his chest.

It was a simple tactic that had just occurred to Meng Hao. It wasn’t

perfect, but it was the best he could come up with on the spur of the moment. He had even used the feathers of the treasured fan and sacrificed the multitude of flying swords in an attempt to catch his opponent off guard. He had done it all for one purpose: to distract his opponent. And it had worked.

Chapter 66: A Great Kindness!

Everything was all to give the wooden swords a chance at a kill!

Ding Yan's eyes narrowed as a feeling of sudden, intense danger welled up in his heart. This was the first time he had experienced this feeling in the backwater State of Zhao. Even in the Southern Domain, he had never provoked the wrath of Foundation Establishment Cultivators; he'd only ever been in tangles with people of the same stage as himself.

Astonished to be in such a perilous situation, he raised his right hand and pushed down between his eyebrows. An exploding sound rippled out, and a massive amount of Violet Qi poured forth from his head. It rapidly congealed into the figure of a person, his back facing Meng Hao.

The vague figure was dressed in a violet robe. An explosive pressure burst out from it, and Violet Qi roiled out everywhere, causing the net to stop in place.

Ding Yan's face paled as the massive net slowed to a halt. He immediately shot backward. The two wooden swords gave no indication that they would stop. They continued to shoot forward without the slightest hesitation, passing through the violet cloud and speeding toward Ding Yan.

"Impossible!" Ding Yan's scalp went numb and his face filled with astonishment. How could he ever have imagined that Meng Hao's two wooden swords could defy the power of his lifesaving magic!?

This lifesaving magic was bestowed upon disciples of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and was capable of resisting the complete power of a Foundation Establishment Cultivator. It could only be used once, and even after all these years, he had never employed its power. Finally, in the face of imminent peril, he had used it today. And yet, it couldn't stop the two wooden swords.

"What type of sword is this!?" The blood drained from Ding Yan's face. At such a critical moment, he didn't have time to think about it. He clenched his jaw and then let out a mighty roar. He bit his tongue and spit

out some blood. This was blood from his Cultivation base, and was connected to his longevity. As soon as he spat it out, his Cultivation base dropped a bit. It would take a significant amount of time in secluded meditation before it could recover.

As soon as he spit the blood out, it transformed into a red mist that was sucked in by the violet mist form that had emerged from his head. He let out a shout:

“Violet Qi from the East!” Immediately, the purple-robed figure turned around. Its face was blurry, but its eyes were clearly radiating a powerful, violet glow.

When the violet glow appeared, Meng Hao’s body shook and pain washed over him like floodwaters. He retreated backward, blood spraying from his back. A roaring sound filled his body, and his consciousness began to waver. He floated backward like a kite with its string cut, then dropped down onto the surface of the North Sea. He slowly sank down into the water.

At the same time, the two wooden swords started to shake. One of them turned violet, seemingly no longer under Meng Hao’s control. It spun out of control, then fell down into the North Sea.

But... that was only one sword. Ding Yan had gone all out, reducing his own life expectancy and damaging his Cultivation base to employ the full power of the lifesaving art. But he had only been able to target one of the wooden swords. The second one, though it was shaking, continued onward. In an instant, it passed through everything to stab into Ding Yan’s chest. Then, it seemed to lose the spiritual power which controlled it. It too fell down into the North Sea.

The sword had stabbed Ding Yan, but not in through the heart. With the aid of the Violet Qi from the East, he was able to avoid being critically injured. Even still, he let out a miserable scream as blood showered out of his chest and mouth.

His hair flew around wildly, and his white robe was soaked with blood. His eyes bloodshot, he covered the wound in his chest and let out a

horrified howl. In all the battles he had fought from the beginning until now, he had never received a serious injury. Now here, in this backwater State of Zhao which he looked down on so much, he had been severely injured by a nobody Cultivator who he had completely disregarded. Furthermore, he had been forced to use his lifesaving method. His eyes were grim as he looked down at the North Sea.

“Your life has been taken by my Violet Qi from the East. But since you dared to injure me, I will drag up your corpse and hack it to pieces!” Ding Yan’s chest burned with pain. He had used blood from his Cultivation base and had damaged his longevity. At this point, he had sunk to the eighth level of Qi Condensation. His face was pale and filled with fury. He produced a medicinal pill and consumed it. And then, suddenly, his facial expression changed. He looked down at the wound in his chest, and his face was seized with terror.

“My spiritual power is being sucked out through the sword wound....” This was something Ding Yan had never experienced before. He gasped as he suddenly realized how amazing Meng Hao’s two wooden swords really were. He immediately shot down into the waters of the North Sea to search for Meng Hao’s corpse, and the two swords.

Deep down in the North Sea, Meng Hao’s body slowly floated down. His eyes were shut, and he didn’t move. It seemed as if he were dead. Ding Yan’s Violet Qi from the East had wrecked his longevity and his Cultivation base. Even though Ding Yan’s power could not compare to that of the Foundation Establishment stage, he was at the peak of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Meng Hao was at the eighth level. He simply had no chance of surviving.

Right now, his body was cold, and the only thing that remained was the tiniest spark, flickering inside his spirit. It wouldn’t take long for that spark to vanish, and then there would be no more Meng Hao.

His Qi passages were shattered, his flesh devoid of life force. His Core Sea seemed to be completely dried up.

But he was not willing. He was not willing to die. Unfortunately, this was

the Cultivation world's law of the jungle. He couldn't fight or resist that. As his body sank deeper and deeper, the spark of life grew more and more faint. Everything was quiet. The spark was about to go out.

A wisp of Qi flowed out from within the North Sea. A droning sound could be heard, and deep within the waters, ripples flowed out to surround Meng Hao. His body suddenly began to glow.

As the glow spread, spiritual energy from the North Sea poured into Meng Hao from all directions, filling his body, mending his Qi passages. Violet-colored blood spilled out from his orifices and pores.

All of the damage inflicted by the Violet Qi from the East was mended. In fact, every single one of his numerous injuries were healed as the spiritual energy of the North Sea poured into him.

Popping sounds rang out from within him as his Qi passages began to flow again. His lifeless body was reformed, and in an instant, once again hummed with life force.

A thunderous roar sounded out as vast amounts of spiritual energy rushed into his Core Sea. Once again it rippled boundlessly. He was still at the eighth level of Qi Condensation, but had actually made significant advancement, and his current power level was almost as much as someone at the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

Within his Core Sea, the Demonic Core undulated, sending out a Demonic aura. It began to absorb all of the Demonic Qi that Meng Hao had accumulated. Its Demonic aura grew stronger and brighter.

Finally, Meng Hao opened his eyes.

He looked calm. He was not excited or shocked or astonished. He had intentionally picked the North Sea as the spot for the showdown. It had all been a gamble, in the hopes that the North Sea Demon would help him.

As he opened his eyes, he straightened his body. There was only water beneath his feet, although some distance away he could see the bottom of the lake. Everything should be pitch black. But because of the silvery sand that spread out, there was a little bit of a glow, which faintly illuminated

the surroundings.

Within the murky waters, Meng Hao could see a boat.

The boat was dilapidated, sunken and resting on the lake floor. Meng Hao suddenly realized that he recognised this boat. It was... the boat he had ridden in that day when he crossed the lake!

He stared silently at the boat, and then cupped his hands and bowed in respect.

Even as he bowed, he heard the twittering laughter of a young girl echoing out across the lake bottom. The laughter circled around, making it impossible to determine its origin. Meng Hao narrowed his eyes, looking down at the floor of the lake.

As the laughter rang out, he saw arms emerging from the silver sand at the bottom of the lake. The hands were all as white as jade. Along with the arms appeared corpses. They were the corpses of young women, floating up from the silver sand.

Black hair swept across the faces of the dozens of them as they floated up from the depths of the lake. Their eyes were closed, their faces pale white but beautiful. Amidst the rippling lake water, Meng Hao watched on, an expression of astonishment on his face as he realized that all of the women... looked exactly the same!

At that same moment, a small girl appeared, standing there in the dilapidated boat. She gave Meng Hao a bashful smile. She seemed to be filled with childlike innocence, but as Meng Hao looked at her, his mind began to spin, and he felt a roaring inside his head.

He had just noticed that the faces of the corpses strongly resembled this girl's face, as if they were her after she had grown up!

"Big brother, will you stay with me here forever?" said the little girl with a light laugh. Her voice was young, and when she spoke, the dozens of corpses floating around her stopped moving, and despite their eyes being closed, it seemed as if all of them were looking straight at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao mind spun, and the roaring sound seemed to consume his

thoughts. Everything in front of started to grow dim, and then to shatter.

He suddenly opened his eyes. He was still floating in the lake water, some distance away from the lake floor, further away than he had been just now. Had it all been a dream? There was no boat, no corpses, and no laughing little girl.

Meng Hao gaped in shock. After a moment, he realized that his body had been healed. He gave a silent nod to the distant lake floor, even though he couldn't see anything down there.

He knew that everything he had just seen had not been an illusion. It was real!

He raised his hands and bowed deeply with clasped hands.

“Meng Hao will always remember your two great kindnesses. I speculate that you wish to become a sea, and that this is what is most important to you. I, Meng, of the junior generation, promise that one day, when my Cultivation base soars to the heavens, that I shall come to your aid. If there is any other way that I can aid you, please tell me.” Meng Hao bowed again, holding the bow for the space of ten breaths. Everything was quiet. He straightened up. He looked down one last time, then shot up towards the surface of the lake.

At the exact moment that he began to move toward the surface, his two wooden swords, which had sunk into the water, began to shake. Then, they shot toward Meng Hao.

One of the swords had just been tracked down by Ding Yan. His eyes gleamed as he reached out to pick up the sword. But then it began to move. Ripples spread out from it, and then, in the blink of an eye, it shot off into the distance.

When Ding Yan saw this, a look of surprise appeared in his eyes. Without hesitation, he raced in pursuit.

“This treasure is sentient!” thought Ding Yan. His heart began to thump wildly as he eagerly sped even faster to intercept the wooden sword.

Chapter 67: The Death of Ding Yan

Meng Hao sped along through the North Sea, moving faster and faster. The Core Sea within him seethed and roiled, and before long he caught sight of the surface of the lake. He burst out of the water, sending waves surging in all directions.

At the same time as he shot out of the lake, his two wooden swords appeared, whistling through the air from different directions as they flew toward him. They circulated around him, one of them coming to rest beneath his feet, the other flying next to him.

Just then, Ding Yan burst out from the lake, and as he flew out, his eyes came to rest on Meng Hao. His face was immediately covered with a look of disbelief. How could it possibly be that Meng Hao... was alive!?

“Impossible! He’s not at the Foundation Establishment stage. Nobody can withstand my Sect’s consummate Violet Qi from the East, backed with the sacrifice of my own Cultivation base and longevity!!” He glared at Meng Hao, retreating backward a bit, still not quite believing what he was seeing.

Perhaps he wasn’t willing to believe because, at the moment, he was no longer at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Even his eighth level of Qi Condensation was a bit unstable. The wound in his chest was not healed, and spiritual energy continued to leak out. He feared that he might soon slip from the eighth level of Qi Condensation down to the seventh.

His face immediately grew pale. However, he wasn’t like Qiu Shuihen and those others. Despite being shocked at seeing Meng Hao alive, he recovered in the blink of an eye. Without hesitation, he shot away, the giant leaf appearing beneath his feet and carrying him off into the distance. He was not fighting, he was fleeing.

He had no choice but to flee. He could tell that Meng Hao was completely recovered, and had in fact improved his Cultivation base, whereas he himself had suffered severe internal injuries. He had no other option than retreat.

Meng Hao watched coldly as Ding Yan fled. He didn't pursue at first, but instead looked down at the lake, making yet another respectful salute.

"I will remember this great kindness for the rest of my life!" said Meng Hao in a voice that could sever nails and slice iron. Then he lifted his head and flicked his sleeve. The sword beneath his feet hummed, and he transformed into a radiant beam of light as he shot in pursuit of Ding Yan.

"Starting now, the hunter becomes the hunted," he said, his eyes filled with the intent to kill. After leaving the Reliance Sect, Meng Hao had never felt the desire to kill anyone as much as he did Ding Yan, except perhaps Shangguan Xiu. His desire to kill spread into his eyes until they shined. During his entire life of Cultivation, he had never been so seriously injured before. In fact, it actually did not count as being injured. He had already... been killed!

A dazzling gleam filled his eyes as he raced in pursuit. In an instant, he left behind the North Sea. In the time it takes an incense stick to burn, he had caught up with Ding Yan, who was consuming medicinal pills even as his Cultivation base continued to drop.

Meng Hao didn't say anything. Instead, he simply lifted his finger, and the wooden sword flying next to him sped forward toward Ding Yan. Pale-faced Ding Yan looked back, well aware of the strange powers of the sword. He smacked his bag of holding, and immediately, the long black bow appeared in his hand. Ignoring his continual loss of spiritual energy, he pulled back on the bow and shot an arrow.

The arrow thundered toward the wooden sword. When they met, an explosion rang out and the arrow collapsed. The wooden sword shuddered.

Meng Hao was expressionless. He lifted his finger again, and the wooden sword sped forward again. Ding Yan, his face pale, had no choice but to shoot another arrow.

A boom rang out. The wooden sword continued on.

Veins of blood filled Ding Yan's eyes. Could he not see that Meng Hao was exacting his revenge, intending to drain his Cultivation base and push

him to complete exhaustion?

After dropping from the ninth level of Qi Condensation, his injuries had worsened. He was weak, but he feared the wooden sword, so he could do nothing else but use his arrows to defend himself. Unfortunately, because of his weakened state, his arrows were also weak, and did not carry the power that they did before. When he shot out his sixth arrow, his body suddenly quivered as his Cultivation base suddenly began to drop from the eighth level of Qi Condensation to the seventh.

The wooden sword was upon him in an instant, stabbing into his chest. It wasn't a critical wound, but blood surged out nonetheless. Ding Yen let out a miserable cry and tried to flee faster.

His body shook as he felt even more spiritual power flowing out of him. His tottering Cultivation base fell rapidly, from the eighth level of Qi Condensation to the seventh!

Of course, his Cultivation base wasn't actually regressing. But he was losing spiritual energy at a rapid rate, and without any recovery. The spiritual energy loss was so great that his level of power was essentially at the seventh level of Qi Condensation.

He was consuming medicinal pills, but unfortunately had two sword wounds, both of which were leaking spiritual energy. There was no way for him to recover at the moment.

"I'm a Violet Fate Inner Sect disciple!" cried Ding Yan with a fierce howl. "If you dare to kill me, the Violet Fate Sect will track you down even if it takes a hundred years! They won't stop until you're dead!" His situation was desperate. He let out another blood-curdling scream as Meng Hao's wooden sword passed by. It didn't stab him, but cut him, whereupon his spiritual energy drained even faster.

"I've already died once," said Meng Hao coolly. His eyes were cold as he waved his finger once more.

Time passed. An hour went by in the blink of an eye, during which time Ding Yan's miserable cries continued to ring out. His body was numb, and appeared to be covered with hundreds of sword wounds. He was soaked in

blood. None of his wounds were critical, but he dripped with so much blood that he looked like a dead person.

Ding Yan was a Cultivator, and as things grew dim, what frightened him the most was not his wounds, but rather, the fact that his body had seemed to become like a sieve. Spiritual energy poured out of him at a shocking rate.

The sixth level of Qi condensation, the fifth, the fourth...

...

A bang rang out, and Ding Yan fell onto the ground, spitting up blood. He scrambled forward, fleeing as fast as he could move. He was no longer capable of any sort of flight. His Cultivation base had dropped so low that it was the same as if he were at the third level of Qi Condensation.

“Meng Hao, if you kill me, you will be slaughtered without a proper burial! I’m a Violet Fate Inner Sect disciple. If I die, it will cause problems for the entire State of Zhao. You don’t dare to kill me!” His body trembled. He fought back the dread in his heart and coughed up more blood.

Meng Hao snatched up Ding Yan’s giant flying leaf. Without a word, he moved his finger again, and the wooden sword shot toward Ding Yan.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. There in the middle of the woods, Ding Yan no longer resembled a disciple of a great Sect. He stared at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with venom. And yet within that venom was also regret. He regretted his desire to watch his opponent consume Demonic cores. Instead, he should have held nothing back and killed him immediately.

“I should have butchered you!” he said, gnashing his teeth, chest heaving. It seemed he was more interested in venting his anger than breathing.

“You know, you taught me something,” said Meng Hao. He was done with his revenge. His hand lifted, and the sword fell. Ding Yan’s head flew into the air, showering blood everywhere. It landed off in the distance, rolling across the ground to rest underneath a large tree.

His eyes were still filled with disbelief. He couldn't believe it, because he was a disciple of the Violet Fate Sect, at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. He was a Chosen, he was to establish his Foundation, whereupon he would be a true Chosen, and his name would rock the Southern Domain.

But here he was, dead in the backwater State of Zhao, killed by Meng Hao, an insect he had held in the palm of his hand.

Meng Hao closed his eyes for a long time. This was not the first time he had killed someone, and this time, he was not filled with emotions. He had already died.

"That day when I ran into Yan Ziguo, I should have killed him, as well as all the people with him." Determination filled his eyes. He had now experienced the result of his indecisiveness back then, when he had the chance to kill Yan Ziguo.

"I don't want to die a second time." He lifted his right hand and made a beckoning gesture. Ding Yan's bag of holding flew over. Then he flicked his sleeve and a Flame Python appeared. It consumed Ding Yan's body and head, turning them into ash.

Meng Hao turned and walked away.

It was evening, and as he walked off into the distance, snow began to fall from the sky. It covered him, his footprints, and the reek of blood. The snow accompanied him as he walked further and further away.

"I am the snow during winter. If I get too close to summer, then... summer will melt me. That is not the world of snow, nor is it my world." Meng Hao disappeared into the distance. He looked like a scholar, but deep down, he was as cold as snow.

Chapter 68: Milky Way City

After the battle at the North Sea, and his rebirth in the depths of the lake, the Death Qi had been completely dispelled. As he walked through the wind and snow, not a sliver of it emanated out.

The fact that the black Qi, which had encircled him for more than a month, was now gone, made Meng Hao's pace a bit more leisurely as he moved through the snowfall.

Snow fell more and more heavily, making seem as if this was the year's last and heaviest snowstorm. The snowflakes appeared to be pushed along by the incoming season, falling out of the sky as fast as possible.

The snow covered him, until he finally reached the cave in Mount Daqing that he had been taken from years before. He sat cross-legged, looking out at the world of snow and listening to the cry of the wind.

Night fell.

Snowfall blocked the night sky, making it impossible to see the stars. The only things visible were the endless sheets of snow which covered the landscape.

A small bonfire burned in front of Meng Hao, illuminating the surroundings with flickering firelight. The light fell onto his face as he sat there thinking.

Nearly four years had passed.

It was almost four years since he had joined the Reliance Sect. He had started out as a youth and had grown into a young man; he was now twenty years of age.

For a long time, Meng Hao sat there, looking down at his hands. They were clean, without a spot of dirt on them. But Meng Hao knew without a doubt that they were stained with blood.

He had killed many times in the past four years. At first, it had caused him much mental tribulation. Now, though you couldn't say he was numb to it, at least he had come to accept it. He had adapted. It was as if some

invisible force of heaven and earth had changed his spirit, his fate, and his future.

“What will I become in the end....” Meng Hao looked out at the snow outside of the cave, but it contained no answers.

Time passed by slowly, and soon dawn approached. Everything was pitch black. The only thing present was the whimpering of the wind and the frigid snow. The bonfire in front of Meng Hao slowly burned out, and the cave was consumed by darkness.

Meng Hao sat there in the dark, and a sense of deep loneliness filled his heart. The feeling grew stronger and stronger until it seemed as if it would consume him.

“Father, mother, where are you....” His voice was soft as he thought of his parents. He missed them so much.

“Fatty, what are you doing right now?” Meng Hao sighed as an image appeared in his mind of Fatty filing away at his teeth.

“Elder Sister Xu, Elder Brother Chen, you are in the Southern Domain... that’s great....” He looked out at the dark night outside the cave, and it was almost as if he could see the Southern Domain. An absentminded expression filled his face.

“Reading hundreds of books is like travelling ten thousand roads.... One day I will leave the State of Zhao and go to the Southern Domain.” A look of determination appeared in his eyes. The State of Zhao was on the very edge of the Southern Domain. The middle of the Southern Domain was very, very far away.

He remembered the map he had seen of the Nanshan Continent. There was a vast wilderness between the State of Zhao and the core of the Southern Domain, as well as several countries.

Given the current level of his Cultivation base, if he tried to travel by soaring, it would take an incredibly long time.

“If only I could become a Foundation Establishment stage Cultivator!” A fire seemed to burn in his eyes, a fire that contained a fierce longing. It

was a longing to be able to fly in the sky, and a thirst to reach the Foundation Establishment stage.

“Reaching Foundation Establishment is being a true Cultivator. Then, my longevity will be extended to one hundred and fifty years.” The concept of extended life was a distant reality to Meng Hao. Usually, people wish for a longer life only when they get older. As of now, Meng Hao didn’t really care about that; what he was most concerned with was continuing to live on and not be in danger.

Unless one wants to live an average life, one must accept the limitations of one’s Cultivation base and latent talent, and fight on.

Meng Hao breathed deeply and looked out as dawn broke over the world. He pulled out Ding Yan’s bag of holding and looked over its contents. His eyes began to glitter.

“He really was the disciple of a great Sect. Even though he hadn’t reached the Foundation Establishment stage, he was filthy rich.” There were seven or eight thousand Spirit Stones inside, as well as the black, wooden bow.

When he pulled the bow out, his entire body felt cold. When he pulled back on the bowstring, it felt as if the spiritual energy of heaven and earth were being pulled into it.

Inside the bag of holding were several hundred black arrows, each one carved with strange markings. He collected them up. In addition to the Spirit Stones and treasured items, there were some pill bottles, assorted message plaques, and other random items.

Most of the pill bottles were empty. However, one small bottle caught Meng Hao’s attention. It was sealed, but when he heard the sound of the pill rattling around inside, his heart thumped. He broke the seal, whereupon a thick, fragrant odor buffeted his face. The entire cave was instantly filled with a medicinal aroma.

This aroma seemed even stronger than that of a Heavenly Spirit Pill. It seemed to be even stronger than Meng Hao’s most powerful pill, the Plateau Charging Pill. In fact, there was really no way to even compare

them. It would be like trying to compare a firefly with a full moon. As far as Meng Hao could tell, one was like a tiny sapling, the other like a mighty tree.

“This is....” Meng Hao’s eyes shone, and he began to breathe quickly. He turned the bottle over and dropped the medicinal pill onto his palm. It was about the size of his thumbnail, and the color of amber. It emanated a powerful fragrance as well as a feeling of boundless spiritual energy. With a simple glance, you could tell this was no ordinary item.

He stared at the pill for a moment, then tapped his bag of holding, retrieving the ancient Pill-name jade slip he had purchased at the Hundred Treasures Pavilion. There were more cracks on its surface than before, although Meng Hao didn’t seem to care. Pressing the jade slip against his forehead, he poured spiritual energy into it.

A moment later, the ancient jade split into pieces, collapsing into ash. Meng Hao opened his eyes. They glowed with powerful excitement.

“A Foundation Establishment Pill! It’s a Foundation Establishment Pill! It’s hard to even determine how much it’s worth!” Palpitating with eagerness, he clutched the pill against his chest. His heart raced, and it took quite some time before he could calm down.

This Foundation Establishment Pill was one of the reasons Ding Yan just couldn’t believe that he would die. It had been made by his master and then gifted to him. Considering that he was at the ninth level of Qi condensation, if he came across a bit of luck in his travels, then he might be able to break through to the Foundation Establishment stage. He had kept it on his person so that he could have it handy when that critical juncture arrived.

Even in a great Sect in the Southern Domain, a Foundation Establishment Pill was not common. It was even less common for them to be distributed to disciples. The requirements to acquire one were very high. Even if more than the usual amount of pills were available, the supply would still fall short of the demand. Most people could not establish a Foundation with only one pill. Usually two or three were

required. Some people with only average latent talent but the support of Sect Elders, might be able to break through with five pills.

Foundation Establishment Pills were truly treasured. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that two of the medicinal herbs required to concoct the pill only grew in the three most dangerous places in the Southern Domain.

Ding Yan had an exceptional master, which gave him a special position within the Violet Fate Sect. When he had reached the ninth level of Qi Condensation, his master had bestowed him with the Foundation Establishment Pill. If he failed in breaking through to the next stage, when he returned to the Sect, his master would not hesitate to give him another.

Meng Hao opened his hand and looked more closely at the Foundation Establishment pill. It was then that he noticed a strange seal on its surface.

The seal bore the image of a demonic face. It was expressionless, solemn, and imparted the feeling that the face was looking at you. Meng Hao's heart thumped. Upon further observation, he determined that the seal did not have any mystical properties. It was simply carved onto the surface of the pill, almost like a logo.

Meng Hao hesitated for a while, then clenched his teeth and put the pill away. Outside, the snowfall was growing lighter, and the rising sun was just becoming visible. He stepped onto the treasured fan and flew out into the cold.

"If I want to break through from the eighth level of Qi Condensation to the ninth, I will need more Spirit Stones. What I have now... it's just not enough. I'm going to need to go sell some things to get more. Eyes glittering, he slapped his bag of holding and produced a jade slip, which he pushed up against his forehead.

This was a jade slip from the Cold Wind Sect, a map that depicted several of the Cultivator Cities within the State of Zhao. Meng Hao saw Eastern Refinement City, but he had no desire to go back there. He needed to go somewhere far away from there, to a place not controlled by the

three great Sects, a place where the Cultivators would be more random.

“Milky Way City,” Meng Hao muttered to himself. Having made his decision, he raised his head, eyes flashing, and soared ahead as fast as the wind.

In the direction of the Milky Way Sea was an area protected by protective spells, a place that mortals could not even see, within which was a city.

Its walls were black, and were patrolled by cold-faced, black-robed Cultivators. They stared out at the people coming in and out of the city.

Milky Way City hadn't existed before three hundred years ago. At that time, an eccentric with a Cultivation base at the Core Formation stage had appeared. His magical power and items were shocking. He had established this city, then gone into secluded meditation. Three hundred years later, no one knew if he was still alive, or dead. It actually didn't really matter. Either he had extended his longevity, or had begun to form his Nascent Soul.

Currently, the city was controlled by his descendants. As for Patriarch Milky Way, he had never had poor a relationship with the three great sects of the State of Zhao. That, coupled with the relaxed rules of the city, had made it grow into the bustling place it was, filled with people of all sorts.

One day, a person appeared outside of Milky Way City. He wore a black robe, and his face was covered by the wide bamboo hat on his head. It was impossible to distinguish his features, although his body seemed to be a bit pudgy.

His getup looked strange, but didn't attract any attention at all in Milky Way City. After all, this place was a jumble of all sorts of strange people. There were more than a few who didn't want others to know who they were or what they were up to.

Of course, this person was none other than Meng Hao.

He had made up his mind to sell some of his magical items and medicinal pills. So, he had disguised himself and come to this place. He

strolled in through the city gates, looking around. As he did, his eyes narrowed. He immediately lowered his head, and, putting on a nonchalant air, entered a shop.

Chapter 69: Young Lord Ding

Shangguan Xiu, garbed in a black robe, frowned as he walked down the street in Milky Way City. Two Cultivators of the seventh level of Qi Condensation, also wearing black robes, walked behind him. From the looks on their faces, they seemed to admire Shangguan Xiu quite a bit.

Accompanying Shangguan Xiu in his inspection of the city, they walked past the shop Meng Hao had just ducked into.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. Even if it wasn't, no one would have been able to see anyway, because of the wide bamboo hat that covered his face. His gaze swept around the place he had entered.

It was a pill shop, only one story high and not very large. Racks filled with pill bottles filled the small space. The bottles were obviously empty, although on the surface of each one was written the name of a pill along with a price.

Off in the corner, a young man sat cross-legged. Other than him, Meng Hao was the only person in the shop.

Meng Hao walked along, examining the names of the various medicinal pills. Eventually, he found a bottle upon which was written the characters "Earthly Spirit Pill." It instantly caught his eye.

"So it's worth three hundred Spirit Stones...." Meng Hao frowned. The copper mirror required two hundred Spirit Stones to duplicate an Earthly Spirit Pill. Although there was a bit of difference in the two prices, it wasn't very much.

Seeing Meng Hao muttering to himself, the man sitting cross-legged in the corner opened his eyes and coolly said, "Earthly Spirit Pills are from the Southern Domain. We don't have many in stock, only five."

Meng Hao nodded. Looking around one final time, he made to leave, but then suddenly stopped. "Do you happen to have Foundation Establishment Pills?"

When the man heard this, he smiled, although it contained a barely

perceptible air of doubt. “Fellow Daoist, this must be your first time in Milky Way City. Foundation Establishment Pills can easily run over one hundred thousand Spirit Stones. They are truly precious. Unfortunately, we don’t have any in stock at all. I’ve only seen one in my entire life. If you are really interested in purchasing one, you’ll have to go to the Milky Way Workshop.”

“So expensive!!” said Meng Hao, his voice filled with awe. Hearing his tone of voice, the young man’s doubt seemed to disappear. He could tell that Meng Hao was simply inquiring, and didn’t have the resources to actually make such a purchase.

Hearing Meng Hao mutter to himself enviously about the incredible price of Foundation Establishment Pills, the young man ignored him and close his eyes again.

Meng Hao left the shop and moved along down the streets of Milky Way City, his eyes shining. Moments later, though, he frowned, for two reasons. One reason was that it didn’t seem it would be that simple to sell medicinal pills and magical items. The other reason was Shangguan Xiu.

“He was wearing a black robe, and was accompanied by more black-robed Cultivators. Those robes are the same ones worn by the city guards. It seems that after leaving the Reliance Sect, he didn’t join another Sect, but rather came to this place.” Meng Hao lowered his head. Instead of leaving, he continued to stroll through the city, checking out shop after shop. As he did, his frown deepened.

It seemed that pills for every level of Qi Condensation were available here. On the one hand, there weren’t a huge amount of pills available, but on the other hand, the prices were not much higher than what he would have to pay to duplicate them. In other words, the profit margin would not be very high.

“Forget about Medicinal Pills. I’ll go check out some magical items.” Meng Hao turned, heading down a different street. There were many Cultivators coming and going, their Cultivation bases of various levels. Most seemed to be between the third and fifth levels. Meng Hao had only

seen three Cultivators who, like him, were at the eighth level of Qi Condensation. Their faces were covered, making it impossible to see their faces clearly.

There were many Treasure Pavilions here. Meng Hao visited them one by one, carefully examining their wares. Soon, evening fell. Meng Hao sighed. Low-level magical items fetched a high price, but nothing close to the hundred thousand Spirit Stones he wanted. To get that much, he would have to sell nearly one thousand flying swords, but such an astonishing event would attract unwanted attention. He simply could not do such a thing.

His other magical items varied in price, but none alone would earn him that many Spirit Stones. And if he sold all of his magical items, it would attract too much attention.

What he wanted to do was handle everything at once, then leave immediately.

Meng Hao currently sat cross-legged in a room in an inn. "If I really want to sell the Foundation Establishment Pill... I have to do it very carefully," he said to himself quietly. "I can't act rashly."

Milky Way City wasn't very big. By the evening of the second day, he had explored the entire city. Finally, he ended up standing across from a luxuriously decorated building. Muttering to himself, he walked toward it.

An inscribed board above the main door read, "Milky Way Workshop."

It was three stories tall. Meng Hao wandered around the first floor, but was prevented from going up to the second. To gain access to the second floor, one must produce evidence of a large number of Spirit Stones.

Meng Hao didn't force the issue. He turned and walked around for a bit looking at things, as if he were just an ordinary customer. Finally, he left.

He sat cross-legged back in the inn, frowning to himself. "There's only one door, guarded by three Cultivators of the eighth level of Qi Condensation, and one of the ninth level.... I can't go up to the second floor, nor see past the curve of the stairs. Everything on the first level is

ordinary items, without any spiritual energy... I need to know what's on the second level. You can tell by looking at the windows on the outside that there is an abundance of spiritual energy there. But the windows are sealed tight." After a long moment, he pulled out the copper mirror.

In his bag of holding, he currently had just a bit over ten thousand Spirit Stones. Gritting his teeth, he took out the Foundation Establishment Pill and placed it onto the copper mirror. It instantly sank into the mirror, disappearing. With a deep breath, Meng Hao began feeding Spirit Stones into the mirror.

When he put the ten-thousandth Spirit Stone into the mirror, a bright light shone out of it, and then a second Foundation Establishment Pill appeared. Meng Hao was prepared; as soon as the fragrant medicinal aroma began to spread out, he put the two pills into his bag of holding, looking around cautiously.

Because of his speed, barely any of the aroma escaped out, and therefore no one noticed.

He sat cross-legged on the bed, his eyes filled with thought. After a moment, he slapped his bag of holding, producing a long, white robe. This was some clothing he had obtained from Ding Yan's bag of holding. He put it on, then hung Ding Yan's jade identification slip around his neck. He stood and started to pace back and forth in the room, looking even more thoughtful than before.

At dawn, two days later, Meng Hao once again donned the bamboo hat, as well as a long outer garment which concealed the white robe underneath. Lowering his head, he left the inn.

He strode directly toward the Milky Way Workshop, arriving in a very short period of time. A cold-faced middle aged man sat there cross-legged, a Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Meng Hao walked past him, heading directly toward the stairs.

As he approached, a cultivator of the eighth level of Qi Condensation glanced at him.

"Show a minimum of ten thousand Spirit Stones to get access to the

second level,” he said.”

“Beat it!” said Meng Hao, lifting his bamboo hat and glaring at the man threateningly. He filled his voice with as much arrogance as possible. “We’re in a small town in the insignificant State of Zhao, and you dare to block the path of Ding Yan?” All of the Cultivators in the room looked at him.

The eighth-level Cultivator stared at him in shock. In all his years, no one had ever dared to speak to him in such a way. But considering the arrogance and veiled threats contained within Meng Hao’s words, the man hesitated, unsure of how to respond.

The pleasant voice of a woman drifted down from upstairs: “Young Lord Ding, please come up.”

The eighth-level Cultivator let Meng Hao pass. With a cold snort, Meng Hao climbed the stairs. As he turned the corner, his eyes quickly scanned the entire second floor.

The pleasant voice from just now belonged to a woman wearing a gauzy dress. She smiled at Meng Hao.

The second floor was richly decorated, and looked much more magnificent than the first floor, filled with a dazzling aura. There were no racks of treasures, but rather an enormous incense burner in the middle of the room, so large that three people could place their arms around it. The thick aroma of incense wafted out from it.

The surroundings were luxurious but also refined. Several tables could be seen around the room, as well as ornamental rock displays. It was the type of place that would make one’s eyes shine just upon seeing it.

The woman standing there in front of Meng Hao appeared to be about thirty years of age. She was elegant and poised, and didn’t say anything at first. She simply smiled, making her seem very warm and considerate.

“Young Lord Ding,” she said, looking over him causally, “please have a seat. I am the second floor attendant. Please do not hesitate to tell me how I can help you.” She took a seat off to the side. When she caught sight of

the white robe underneath his long outer garment, a look of surprise flickered in her eyes, and then quickly disappeared.

Meng Hao looked around thoughtfully. There were seven tables spread about in various positions. Without hesitation, Meng Hao chose to sit, not at a table next to the stairs, or a window, but right in the middle of the room.

“Do you have Foundation Establishment Pills here?” he said as he sat down, not beating around the bush. He stared at the woman, his expression somber.

When the woman saw him sit down where he did, her eyes flickered again, as if he had just confirmed something to her. And yet, she still seemed to be uncertain about something.

“There are not many things in the State of Zhao that we don’t have here at the Milky Way Workshop,” she said with a smile. “Of course we have Foundation Establishment Pills. The price is two hundred thousand Spirit Stones per pill.”

Meng Hao nodded slightly, then slapped his bag of holding. A pill bottle appeared in his hand. He flicked his sleeve, and the bottle shot toward the woman.

Her eyes flickered as she caught the bottle. When she opened it and looked at the contents, her expression changed to one of surprise.

“One Foundation Establishment Pill,” said Meng Hao coolly. “Name your price.”

“Young Lord Ding, you are quite audacious,” she said calmly, an unusual expression in her eyes. “You dare to casually hand me something so valuable. Don’t you fear that I might take it and flee?”

Meng Hao didn’t say anything. Staring at her coldly, he loosened his outer garment, revealing more of the white robe, as well as the jade pendant hanging around his neck.

It was violet-colored, and emitted a soft, flickering violet glow.

When she caught sight of the jade pendant, the woman's expression changed.

"If you dare to swallow that pill," said Meng Hao coldly, "Milky Way City will be reduced to rubble in less than a month."

The woman's expression changed several times as she looked back down at the pill bottle. She glanced back at Meng Hao sitting there. Having taken note of all the various clues regarding his identity, she finally smiled again.

"Young Lord Ding, please don't take offense. I was simply making conversation." She tipped the bottle over, sending the Foundation Establishment pill tumbling into her palm. Then she held it up and examined it closely. When her gaze fell upon the demonic face carved into the surface of the pill, her expression changed dramatically, and she stood up.

Chapter 70: Breaking Through to the Ninth Level of Qi Condensation!

“This pill was concocted personally by Grandmaster Pill Demon of the Violet Fate Sect. Its.... Young Lord Ding, what is your relationship to Grandmaster Pill Demon...?”

“Name your price.” He said nothing else. He frowned, his eyes filled with a look that made it seem as if whether he wanted to or not, he had no choice but to sell the pill.

“A pill personally concocted by Grandmaster Pill Demon could be auctioned off for an amazing price. This pill....” The woman hesitated for a moment, then seemed to come to a decision. “I can give you two hundred fifty thousand Spirit Stones!”

Meng Hao was silent for a moment. Finally, he nodded and said, “Done.” He stood up.

The woman lifted her hand and flicked her finger toward the incense burner in the middle of the room. A clear and melodious sound rang out, and about ten seconds later, a young girl came down from the third floor bearing a jade platter. She quickly reached Meng Hao, then offered up the platter with both hands.

On the white jade platter was a bag of holding.

Meng Hao took it and looked inside, then turned and walked down the stairs. Amidst the gazes of the Cultivators on the first floor, he walked out of the Milky Way Workshop and off into the distance.

A while later, when he reached a place that wasn’t very crowded, he ducked into an alley and stripped off the outer garment. He quickly changed into another robe and then made his way off as quickly as possible, his head lowered.

Meanwhile, back on the second floor of the Milky Way Workshop, the woman stood respectfully next to an old man. The old man, who wore a resplendent garment, was currently standing at the window, looking off

into the distance. In his hand was the Foundation Establishment Pill that Meng Hao had sold.

A long time passed before he finally opened his mouth. "Are you sure?" he said coolly.

"I of the junior generation already did some checking," she said in a respectful tone. "There was indeed a Violet Fate Sect disciple surnamed Ding who arrived recently in the State of Zhao."

"Are you sure that was him?" said the old man slowly.

"At first, junior was not certain. After all, Ding Yan is of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and this person was of the eighth. However, his arrogant behavior on the first floor certainly seemed like that of a disciple of a great Sect. This was the first clue.

"Upon reaching the second floor, he didn't select a chair near the window or the stairs, but rather in the middle of the room. This gives evidence of his confidence, as if he didn't care that we might have made a move against him. This level of confidence is impossible for someone of the eighth level of Qi Condensation to have, unless of course they are a member of a powerful Sect. That was the second clue.

"Moments later, junior saw his white garments, as well as a jade pendant from the Violet Fate Sect. He revealed it intentionally, but this is the State of Zhao, after all. He has to take some precautions. This was the third clue.

"More telling, he directly gave the pill bottle to junior, as if he didn't care whether or not I might consume the pill. When junior inquired about this, his response was one that a member of a State of Zhao Sect could never match. This was the fourth clue.

"Finally, the Foundation Establishment Pill is marked with the seal of Grandmaster Pill Demon. No one would dare to make a counterfeit of such a pill. Furthermore, junior has researched such things, and am certain the seal is genuine.

"Because of these five clues, junior is certain that this person was Ding

Yan of the Violet Fate Sect. It is said that two years ago, Grandmaster Pill Demon accepted a disciple with that name. It seems the person here today was none other than him.” The woman smiled, her expression filled with confidence, shrewdness and intelligence.

“Unless....” She suddenly seemed to hesitate.

“Unless what?” asked the old man, turning to look at her, his expression both warm and encouraging.

“Unless the person today was incredibly intelligent, and purposefully did all of these things. Perhaps he created the perfect cover story, and the seal on the Foundation Establishment Pill is actually fake. But, the probability of such a thing is remote. There is no disciple among the so-called Sects of the State of Zhao who could accomplish something like that.” The woman smiled, her expression once again one of confidence.

“Correct,” said the old man. “Being able to sort through all these clues in this way shows how intelligent you are, Mu’er. It seems you’ve really grown sharper in the past few years. This medicinal pill is real. It seems eighty to ninety percent likely that this person was none other than Ding Yan.” He looked fondly at the woman.

“Many thanks for your praise, Patriarch,” she said with a smile. Looking up at him, she asked, “Are you really going to let him go, just like that?”

“We cannot afford to cause trouble with the Violet Fate Sect. As for Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Foundation Establishment Pill...” The old man seemed to think for a moment, before softly saying, “Mu’er, considering that your latent talent is ordinary, why don’t you give the pill to your father?”

When she heard his words, her eyes suddenly flashed.

“He’s back?” Her voice suddenly seemed grim.

“He came back a few months ago. He left all those years ago to join the Reliance Sect, but the Sect was disbanded. As usual, he has yet to establish his Foundation... you should go see him.” Looking at the woman, the old man frowned, then sighed.

She was quiet for a moment. "I have my responsibilities here to take care of," she said coldly. "Whoever Patriarch gives the Foundation Establishment Pill to, well, it doesn't have anything to do with me."

"He's your father, after all. Furthermore, it seems to me he has some weighty matters on his mind, and might leave again soon. You should think about it carefully." Shaking his head, the old man turned and left.

"Father...." Shangguan Mu sat down quietly, looking out the window, her eyes filled with bitterness.

As for Meng Hao, after changing clothes, he left the black-walled Milky Way City without the slightest bit of hesitation. Some distance away from the city, he hopped onto the treasured fan and sped off into the distance, his body turning into a prismatic rainbow.

He kept going for several days, until it became apparent that no one was pursuing him. At that point, he felt a bit more relaxed. In the wilderness some distance away from Mount Daqing, he used a flying sword to cut out an Immortal's Cave for himself and then entered into secluded meditation.

This time, he was determined to break through to the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

He had plenty of Spirit Stones which he could use to duplicate Heavenly Spirit Pills. When he consumed enough Heavenly Spirit Pills, and his Cultivation base reached the appropriate level, he would begin to push toward the next level.

Time passed slowly. Soon, several months had passed. Meng Hao didn't not leave the Immortal's Cave. He sat there quietly, cross-legged, consuming medicinal pills and circulating his Cultivation base. As time passed, his Cultivation base grew more and more refined.

By the time the fifth month arrived, it seemed boundless. His Cultivation base roared, and his Core Sea roiled. He had long since arrived at the peak of the eighth level of Qi Condensation. He was only a sliver away from the ninth level, and yet had been stuck at this sliver for two months already.

Thinking about the over one hundred thousand Spirit Stones he had spent already made Meng Hao's heart hurt. But what hurt even more was that after spending all of those Spirit Stones, he still hadn't been able to break through.

"Elder Xu told me that the fourth, sixth and eighth levels of Qi Condensation were bottlenecks. The year I broke through the fourth level, I had lots of Dry Spirit Pills. I broke through the sixth level when the North Sea demonstrated the Dao. Now I'm at the eighth level bottleneck... How do I break through?!" Meng Hao opened his bloodshot eyes.

Of the well over two hundred thousand Spirit Stones he'd had, only about fifty thousand now remained. The rest had been turned into Heavenly Spirit Pills. Currently, he was running low on Heavenly Spirit Pills as well.

As he had speculated, when relying only on medicinal pills to grow his Cultivation base, the effects grew weaker and weaker the more pills he consumed. He needed larger and larger amounts, a vicious cycle.

"I wonder what other people do in this situation," he thought, frowning. Despite pondering the situation over and over, he couldn't figure it out.

It seemed that no matter how many Heavenly Spirit Pills he consumed, and no matter how his Cultivation Base grew, he just couldn't make that final step.

Another month passed. Meng Hao had already spent half a year in secluded meditation. Today, he sat there, hair in disarray, eyes bloodshot. In the past month, he had duplicated ten Plateau Charging Pills, which were supposed to be effective in the ninth level of Qi Condensation. He had hoped that using them would enable him to break through the bottleneck. While they had been somewhat effective, they hadn't produced the desired result.

"I must reach the ninth level of Qi Condensation!" He ground his teeth as he looked at what remained of his fifty thousand Spirit Stones. Not hesitating any longer, he took out the copper mirror. He had decided to duplicate the Foundation Establishment Pill!

A glow appeared, and there in front of him were two Foundation Establishment Pills. Including the original, he now had three Foundation Establishment Pills. If you showed these three pills to a disciple of one of the great Sects of the Southern Domain, they would gasp with astonishment. In the State of Zhao, it would be enough to cause a bloodbath if anyone saw them.

Today, Meng Hao would use these pills, not to establish his Foundation, but to break through the bottleneck. Anyone who knew he was using the pills in this way would surely go crazy at the thought of such luxurious waste.

Through history, there were likely few people who would ever go to such extravagant lengths to break through a Qi Condensation bottleneck.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, then lifted up a pill, put it into his mouth, and swallowed it. A thunderous roar filled his mind, and his body shook. A majestic spiritual energy filled him that he never before could have imagined, exploding throughout his body.

...

During his half a year in secluded meditation, some events had occurred which he was unaware of. These events actually affected the entire State of Zhao. The first was the wildfire-like spread of the news of Meng Hao's deal with the Violet Fate Sect disciples. It didn't take long before Meng Hao's name was known across the land.

Everyone knew that Meng Hao had mercilessly cheated the Violet Fate Sect.

Soon after this, the Cold Wind Sect and the Winding Stream Sect nearly declared war on each other. In the end, Sect priests of the Core Formation stage emerged and managed to calm things down. Shortly thereafter, the two Sects issued a joint order of arrest.

The evildoer Meng Hao of the Reliance Sect was now wanted. Anyone who killed him would receive a reward of Spirit Stones, medicinal pills and magical items. This was the first time in hundreds of years that two great Sects had joined together to issue an order of arrest. This news caused a

great sensation in the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao.

Of course, no one really knew how to track down the man who had caused the bloody incident regarding the silver spear. But he had been marked for punishment, and the news spread quickly. Soon, Meng Hao was yet again the subject of discussion among all the Cultivators of the State of Zhao.

Whenever Cultivators gathered, they would end up talking about Meng Hao.

“I heard that when he was in the Reliance Sect, he robbed someone from one of the great Clans of the Southern Domain, a guy named Wang Tengfei who had joined the Sect. When he became a member of the Inner Sect, Wang Tengfei left in a rage.”

“That’s nothing. I heard directly from some former Reliance Sect members that Meng Hao opened a shop there. He ripped off a lot of his fellow disciples. They were all furious, of course, but didn’t dare to say anything.”

“Wow, it seems he’s been developing this devious personality for quite a while. It’s no surprise he cheated the Violet Fate Sect disciples, as well as Liu Daoyun and Sun Hua....”

“It looks like he just rips off whoever he runs into. He’s been cheating people ever since he left the Reliance Sect....”

Conversations and discussions like this filled the Cultivation World of the State of Zhao. If that was the extent of it, it would not have been a very big deal. Eventually the buzz would have died out. Except before that could happen, the three great Sects joined forces to recall the original arrest order and issue a new one. There was no discernable reason for this action.

The new arrest order was still for Meng Hao. However, killing him was now prohibited. Rewards would now be given, not for his death, but for his capture, or clues regarding his whereabouts!

According to the order, he could be injured or crippled, but not killed.

Such a strange arrest order instantly aroused the attention of quite a few people. Eventually, some of the most well-informed people were able to put the clues together to understand what was going on.

“The Core Formation Eccentrics of the three great Sects went last month to visit the State of Revelation. They paid respects to Lord Revelation, and asked him to divine whether or not Patriarch Reliance is really dead or not. According to his divination, Patriarch Reliance is weak to the point of death. However, the Immortal’s Cave he is in can only be opened by an Inner Sect disciple. Lord Revelation is already here with them in the State of Zhao, searching for where Patriarch Reliance is sealed in secluded meditation!”

As soon as the news began to spread, the three great Sects went to great lengths to stamp down the rumors. Anyone found spreading them would be punished by death penalty, and any city where the rumors appeared would be enveloped by a sealing spell casted by the three great Sects, preventing anyone from going in or out.

Chapter 71: Dong Hu

In the remote wilderness not too far from Mount Daqing, Meng Hao sat in the Immortal's Cave, his body shaking. Sweat poured off of him, soaking him as he emanated an intense heat. This in turn produced a thick mist that circulated around the cave, filling it with the aroma of sweat.

Meng Hao's entire body was bright red, and it felt as if an immense fire were raging inside of him that would soon wither up his flesh and blood and turn him into a pile of ash. At the moment, his body was completely stiff, incapable of the slightest movement.

Actually, this is one of the detriments of consuming a Foundation Establishment Pill. After swallowing it, the body becomes immovable. Until the power of the pill is disseminated, it wouldn't matter if there was a flood or a storm, or if a person stood in front of you with a sword, ready to stab you through, you wouldn't be able to move a muscle. This is why Cultivators are incredibly careful when selecting the area where they will consume a Foundation Establishment Pill.

After all, if one encountered an enemy while suffering from the side-effect of the astounding pill, death would be the result.

Meng Hao was the first person to ever consume a Foundation Establishment Pill while in the eighth level of Qi Condensation. Furthermore, this pill had been concocted by a Grandmaster.

But, he had no other choice. It was just too difficult to break through the bottleneck of the eighth level of Qi condensation without the aid of either some stroke of luck, or special medicinal pills.

The Plateau Charging Pills had not been effective, so now the only thing he had left were the Foundation Establishment pills. Of course, he didn't dare use too many at once. They were incredibly powerful, and his body was not. Consuming them was actually gambling with his own life.

By now, Meng Hao felt quite certain he knew why this eighth level bottleneck was so difficult to break through. It definitely had something to

do with his years of consuming so many Demonic cores. Despite his rebirth in the North Sea, the Demonic power within his bones could not be dispelled easily.

Because of this reason, the blockage caused by the bottleneck was thicker than that experienced by the average person. Of course, there were also advantages to this situation. Once he broke through the bottleneck, he would explode into the middle of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Furthermore, his body, although it seemed weak, was now much tougher than it had been during his scholar days. The change was slow, but sure.

This change had not been brought about by his Cultivation, but rather because of the Demonic power within his body, as well as the Demonic core in his Core Sea.

Days and days passed. Soon two months had gone by, during which time Meng Hao had continued to consume his scant supply of Foundation Establishment Pills. Just now, he had fully absorbed the power of a pill. Suddenly, he opened his eyes. He could move again! He felt a roaring within himself, along with a severe pain, as if various parts of his body were being ripped apart. He spit out a mouthful of black blood.

As he spit out the blood, his eyes grew dim, as if he were about to lose consciousness. Instead he bit his tongue, forcing himself to stay awake. He circulated his Cultivation base as it shot toward the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

A look of determination filled his eyes. Gathering together the explosive spiritual power within him, he pushed forward.

In an instant, the spiritual energy charged ahead, filling his head with a roaring like thunder. He felt as if his body were about to explode. Then suddenly, it felt as if the spiritual energy had opened up a new realm inside him. Instantly, he felt a wonderful sensation, difficult to describe. It was a tingling feeling, as if someone were caressing him with countless feathers.

He immersed himself in the feeling, and a long time passed before he opened his eyes. They glowed dazzlingly. It was as if the darkness of the

cave were being split by brilliant lightning bolts.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, and the spiritual energy of the cave seemed to be sucked into him strand by strand. Then it left him, and massive amounts of filth extruded from his pores. His body grew lighter, his eyes brighter.

The boundless Core Sea inside him was twice its previous size, as if you couldn't see from one side to the other. The golden water billowed and roared. Deep within, the Demonic core rested, unmoving, sending out massive amounts of spiritual energy, making the golden light even more dazzling, filling Meng Hao's body. He almost felt like lifting his head up and letting out a long, loud cry.

"The ninth level of Qi Condensation! I, Meng Hao, have finally reached the ninth level! My next step will be Foundation Establishment!" His eyes filled with exuberance, he took several deep breaths.

"With the Sublime Spirit Scripture, I can establish a Flawless Foundation, far superior to a Cracked or Fractured Foundation." He stood up, filled with confidence and hope regarding the future.

He looked forward to traveling to the Southern Domain and seeing the lands there. He looked forward even more so to the day when he could establish his Foundation. He wondered what it would be like to have a Flawless Foundation. What would other Cultivators think when they ran into him then?

Of course, having not established his Foundation, he didn't understand how rare a Flawless Foundation was. Despite his ignorance, he still looked forward with eager anticipation.

He flicked his sleeve, and a fist-sized Water Globe appeared. It stretched out, forming a sheet of water the size of his body. He walked forward, through the water. When he came out on the other side, the filth that covered him was gone, and instead, a fragrant aroma drifted off of him.

The door of the Immortal's Cave shattered. It was midday outside, and the season had long since changed. Meng Hao walked out to feel a hot, dry wind on his face. His entire body felt relaxed and fresh.

“When I establish my Foundation, I will finally be able to achieve true flight.” He looked up at the blue sky and his smile grew wider and wider. He walked forward a bit, then hopped onto his treasured fan and sped along.

He was flying along some distance away from Mount Daqing when he suddenly caught sight of someone racing in his direction. This person was moving as fast as possible, and was being chased by a large, vicious looking man.

The person being chased was pale-faced, but had hard eyes. He wasn't very tall, and rather skinny, appearing to be about thirteen or fourteen years old. Despite this, his Cultivation base was at the fifth level of Qi Condensation.

He was being chased by a cultivator of the sixth level of Qi Condensation. The man wore a tattered aqua-blue robe and it seemed as if he had been wounded. Murder roiled within his furious eyes.

“It doesn't matter where you try to run, Dong Hu. If you give me the pearl, considering my status in the Upright Evening Sect, I can leave you with your life. Otherwise, you're dead!” The big man raised his right hand, and a frigid glow appeared which solidified into a Full Moon Scimitar. He tossed it spinning toward the youth.

The youth was none other than one of Meng Hao's group who Elder Sister Xu had taken to the Reliance Sect, Little Tiger. (TL Note: The character “Hu” in the name “Dong Hu” means “tiger”)

After the dissolution of the Sect, he had been swept away and then disappeared. Meng Hao floated above, looking down at Little Tiger.

Little Tiger's face was pale, but killing intent flickered within his hard eyes. He waved his sleeves, whereupon several beams of cold light shot out, glittering arrows. Based on their gleam they seemed to be coated with poison. The arrows shot toward the big man.

He laughed, waving his sleeve, which caused a wind to spring up and brush the arrows away. His hand flickered in incantation patterns, causing his scimitar to shoot toward Little Tiger. It was upon him in the blink of

an eye. Little Tiger's bloodshot eyes spun. Suddenly, an aqua-blue pearl appeared in his hand. It was partly transparent, and was filled with layers of curling clouds. A stream of clouds erupted from within the pearl, coalescing into a vague figure, which shot toward the scimitar.

When they collided, a bang rang out, and the scimitar collapsed into pieces, as did the vague figure.

The big man coughed up some blood, and the greed in his eyes grew stronger. He continued his pursuit.

The blood drained from Little Tiger's face. It seemed the attack just now had been quite difficult to pull off. He staggered forward, running a few paces before tumbling to the ground.

"You can't escape!" laughed the big man viciously, quickly approaching Little Hu, whose eyes filled with desperation. Off in the distance, Meng Hao sighed, looking back at the scene. Finally, he lifted a finger on his right hand, causing a furious wind to spring up in the forest. The crushing pressure of the ninth level of Qi Condensation instantly enveloped the big man. Trembling, he looked up in shock to see Meng Hao floating down toward him.

Simultaneously, Little Tiger, who was still on the ground, pulled a poisoned dagger out of his sleeve. He leaped up with surprising speed, and the dagger flashed. At the exact moment in which the big man was surprised by Meng Hao, the dagger slashed through his neck.

He let out a miserable cry as blood showered everywhere, covering Little Tiger. Little Tiger was still weak and exhausted, but falling down just now had actually been a trick. When the man approached with his guard down, he had planned to make his move.

The big man collapsed to the ground, twitching. He tried to cover the gash in his neck, but blood flowed out in vast quantities. Within moments, he was dead. His eyes stared blankly off into the distance.

Little Tiger took a few steps away, looking back at Meng Hao, seeming ready to flee at any moment. Then he felt the power of Meng Hao's Cultivation base, and his body began to tremble.

Meng Hao didn't say anything. He walked over and stood over the corpse, examining it. Then he looked at the obviously nervous Little Tiger, staring at him silently.

Little Tiger didn't say anything either. He just looked at Meng Hao, a complicated expression in his eyes.

A long moment passed, after which Meng Hao opened his mouth. "It was because of this pearl that you killed Wang Youcai," he said calmly. An imperceptible look in his eye revealed that he was bluffing, but Little Tiger didn't see it.

Instead, Little Tiger stood there silently, refusing to speak. He was short, with dark skin and a skinny frame. His clothes were dilapidated, and he was obviously in a difficult position. He almost looked like a beggar. But the coldness he had just exhibited when killing the man just now seemed to make everything obvious.

Meng Hao looked at him for a while, before shaking his head. He let out a sigh, and turned to leave.

Just as he did this, however, a look of hesitation appeared in Little Tiger's eyes. He suddenly spoke, his voice hoarse and filled with nervousness.

"Elder... Elder Brother Meng, are you going to Mount Daqing to save everyone?"

Meng Hao halted in his tracks and looked back at Little Tiger. "What are you talking about?" he said, his voice low.

Chapter 72: A True Man

Little Tiger looked closely at Meng Hao. He had been naive as a child, but after joining the Reliance Sect, had experienced many unimaginable misfortunes. In his heart, he had become as hard as iron. No one knew how many Cultivators he had secretly slain.

He stared at Meng Hao and gradually came to the realization that he really did not know about what had happened recently.

“Elder Brother Meng, in recent days, the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao has been searching for you. The three great Sects issued a joint order for your arrest. Multitudes of Cultivators have spread out in all directions to hunt you down.” He hesitated a moment before continuing.

Meng Hao’s expression did not change even in the least bit. He floated in the air, looking down wordlessly at Little Tiger.

“The three great Sects ordered that you were not to be killed,” he said slowly. “You could be injured or crippled, but not slain.” The entire time, he continued to look at Meng Hao, unable to tell what he was thinking.

“If what you’re saying is false,” said Meng Hao coolly, his expression the same as ever, “then don’t blame me for forgetting our past ties.”

Hearing this, Little Tiger inadvertently took two steps backward, his face flickering.

“Elder Brother Meng must surely remember Master Uncle Shangguan from the Inner Sect. Two months ago, he surrounded the three counties near Mount Daqing with a horrific, enormous spell.” His voice rang out as he spoke. He clenched his fists. “He plans to use the blood of the mortals there to concoct Blood Pills to establish his Foundation. It’s been going on for two months already. With my Cultivation base, I’m no match for him, but I came to try to save my father and mother!”

Meng Hao stared at him in shock, his head spinning. Fury erupted within him, and a violent aura of killing intent began to emanate from him. He knew that Shangguan Xiu’s true goal was not to concoct Blood

Pills, but rather to lure him out.

His face grew incredibly grim.

“Shangguan Xiu has involved the mortals of three counties, and the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao does nothing to stop him?” Meng Hao’s voice was as cold as ice as he spoke. “Does anyone actually believe his goal is establishing a Foundation?”

“Everyone says that Shangguan Xiu longs for Foundation Establishment,” said Little Tiger, “and that he intentionally picked the three counties around Mount Daqing because of the auspicious sign that appeared here years ago. With Blood Spirit Pills, he can easily break through to Foundation Establishment. In the past, the three great Sects would never allow him to do something like that, but right now they seek out Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone. That’s why they sent everyone looking for you, and have ignored what is happening here. They don’t want to have to deal with extra trouble. Furthermore, Shangguan Xiu is no ordinary person. I looked into it and found out he’s from Milky Way City. Apparently, the three great Sects did attempt to interfere at first, but then backed off for some reason.”

Meng Hao listened quietly, then began to smile, a cold, dark smile. The killing intent which existed in his heart far outmatched the killing intent he had felt in the past toward Wang Tengfei or even Ding Yan. The intensity of this desire to kill sent this Core Sea churning. It was fiercer than anything he had felt in his twenty-one years of life.

“Shangguan Xiu....” Meng Hao spun and looked off toward Mount Daqing. He flicked his wide sleeve and Little Tiger flew up onto the treasured fan, a shocked look on his face.

“Elder Brother Meng, what’s going on?” blurted Little Tiger, his breath quickening.

“We’re going to Mount Daqing. If what you’ve said is true, very well. But if you’ve lied to me, then you will never again have to worry about people chasing after you to get your treasure.” The treasured fan flickered, and they shot off.

Little Tiger was quiet, having nothing more to say. He stood on the treasured fan next to Meng Hao, a conflicted look in his eye. Soon the look disappeared, replaced by determination.

It didn't take long before Mount Daqing loomed up in front of them. Meng Hao did not charge in directly. The treasured fan flashed, and they landed on the ground. Up ahead, everything was enveloped by a glowing red aura. It seemed that outside of the aura, every one thousand kilometers, a black robed Cultivator sat cross-legged, meditating.

There were a dozen or so of them, and they appeared to be the supporting the base of the spell which surrounded the three counties.

Far away on top of the mountain, someone sat cross-legged in meditation.

In the counties below the mountain, everything was quiet. Wispy strands of Blood Qi rose up from them.

Meng Hao's killing intent grew stronger. Taking a deep breath, he released the bonds he had placed on Little Tiger.

"When I call your name, you must come," said Meng Hao slowly. Then he walked forward, his body whistling in the wind and emanating an ice-cold air.

"Wang Youcai isn't dead," blurted Little Tiger. Meng Hao ignored him as he raced forward.

Little Tiger watched him disappear, then sighed and sat down silently to meditate. He had looked into Meng Hao in addition to Shangguan Xiu. He knew that Meng Hao had no immediate family in Yunjie County and that Shangguan Xiu was most likely using this blood magic specifically to draw him out.

"Elder Brother Meng, I just want to save my father and mother. If you live through this, then I will owe you a great debt." He looked up, complex emotions flickering in his eyes.

Meng Hao shot forward, straight toward the blood-red aura. Little Tiger, though young, was clever and had been correct in his suppositions. As for

Meng Hao, he had always been intelligent. Despite failing as a scholar, he had undergone a baptism of sorts in the Reliance Sect. After everything he had experienced there and after, how could he not see through to his opponent's true purpose?

Shangguan Xiu had set a trap for him. But how could he not go? Even though he had no immediate family in Yunjie County, it was his home. His childhood memories were there, and they were beautiful.

Shangguan Xiu was utterly devoid of conscience, and his actions offended Meng Hao to the bone. His desire to kill billowed to untold heights.

Even though he was risking death, even though he was playing into Shangguan Xiu's hand, Meng Hao knew that in life, there are some things a man must do.... even if it was dangerous, he would go anyway.

Fear and doubt were not for true men.

His murderous intent had never been so strong, his desire to kill never so intense. It could not be dispelled by the death of one person, but rather every person involved in maintaining the blood spell.

"In my years of Cultivation, there are people who I haven't killed. It's not because I couldn't, but because I didn't want to." His speed increased, his eyes flashing with death, but his heart calm. By now he had reached the area of the blood spell. He shot toward a Cultivator of the sixth level of Qi Condensation who sat there meditating.

He wore black robes and looked to be about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. As Meng Hao rushed toward him, he opened his eyes. Shocked, he lifted his hand, but in that instant, Meng Hao, his face expression cold and filled with death, shot past him.

There was a sword in Meng Hao's hand. Behind him, a head flew up into the air, its face filled with confusion. The body fell over onto the ground.

The reek of blood filled the air. The corpse twitched a few times and then was still.

There was no shout of pain, no struggle. To Meng Hao, it was as simple

as slaughtering a chicken. As he had said, it was not that he couldn't kill, he just didn't like to.

"When you try to cut off a chicken's head," said Meng Hao to himself, "it will usually put up a bit of a struggle. People usually struggle even harder. But without a head, you don't even match up to a chicken." Not even glancing back at the corpse behind him, he moved on, eyes filled with killing intent.

He moved quickly, and before long, another cross-legged figure appeared in front of him. This person had clearly not sensed the death of his compatriot; he sat there meditating, maintaining the spell.

He didn't even have a chance to open his eyes before his head flew off his body.

"Shangguan Xiu, you force me into killing. Very well... today I will kill everything in front of me." He flicked the wooden sword in his hand, sending droplets of blood flying about everywhere, then vanished.

Because of the death of the two Cultivators, ripples had appeared in the red-colored spell. This in turn shocked the rest of people who were maintaining it; one after another, they opened their eyes and stood up, glancing around cautiously.

Meanwhile, atop the mountain, Shangguan Xiu's eyes flickered open. They glittered as he looked down at what was going on below.

The Blood Qi seemed to grow thicker, but he couldn't see clearly what was happening. He frowned and harrumphed. He lifted his right hand, and a Globe of blood appeared, about the size of a human head. Blood Qi swirled around inside. With the flick of a sleeve, he sent the Blood Globe shooting down Mount Daqing, where it slammed through the blood-colored spell with a reverberating boom.

The blood-colored spell was growing weak. Suddenly, a shrill scream could be heard, echoing out from within the spell. Difficult to describe, it seemed to be filled with pain.

Moments later, another scream rang out. This scream clearly came from

someone else, but it was equally blood-curdling. Shangguan Xiu frowned. Looking down at the blood-colored spell, it appeared to have shrunk by almost half and was somewhat murky.

A third person screamed, then a fourth, almost at the same time. More screams echoed out, over and over, until finally the blood-colored spell was completely translucent. Shangguan Xiu looked down to see... a dozen headless corpses.

His eyes narrowed, and his body spun. There, on a small mountain path, wearing a blue scholar's robe, was Meng Hao. He was spattered with blood and gore, and despite looking somewhat frail and weak, walked slowly up the mountain, his face expressionless.

In his hands, he carried a dozen severed heads. Shangguan Xiu looked at him as he approached. Meng Hao tossed the heads forward, and they plopped to the ground in front of Shangguan Xiu, who then flicked his sleeve, sending them scattering about.

"Your turn," said Meng Hao, his voice hoarse. He usually didn't want to kill, but today. He did.

Chapter 73: Fierce Fighting

“Ninth level of Qi Condensation!” Eyeing Meng Hao, Shangguan Xiu took a deep breath. He had been maintaining the spell here for two months. The Cultivators from Milky Way City didn’t know the true reason he was here, and he didn’t want their top level experts around anyway. He was here for Meng Hao.

Based on everything he had seen and heard recently, he had been sixty-percent certain that Meng Hao possessed some sort of unholy treasured item that could endlessly duplicate treasures.

Otherwise, how could he have so many medicinal pills and flying swords? Also, how could Meng Hao have not noticed that ten of his flying swords went missing on the day of his battle with Wang Tengfei?

They appeared to have been broken, but in fact, had been secretly taken away by Shangguan Xiu and carefully studied. He had discovered that all ten of the swords were composed of exactly the same materials.

Even though all flying swords look the same in general, there will always be tiny differences left behind in the manufacturing process which can be spotted later. Except, among Meng Hao’s swords, the details were exactly the same. This, of course, aroused Shangguan Xiu’s suspicions.

And yet, he wasn’t completely convinced because of that evidence. But now, seeing that Meng Hao’s Cultivation base had already reached the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he was even more sure. Eighty percent or more.

“You may have reached the ninth level of Qi Condensation, but clearly you just broke through,” said Shangguan Xiu, his eyes shining coldly. “Should you try to run away again today, I will detonate that Blood Globe I just sent down the mountain. If that happens, then the people of the three counties will be reduced to ash and smoke in the blink of an eye.” He really was worried that Meng Hao would flee, so before attacking, had taken preparations to prevent him from doing so.

“I won’t be running away today.” As Meng Hao looked at Shangguan Xiu,

nearly five years of memories flooded into his mind. Their issues from before the Sect dissolved, the chase after the Sect disbanded, all of these things flashed before Meng Hao's eyes. His killing intent flashed. He lifted his hand, and a massive Flame Python appeared, over ten meters in length. Not only was its size impressive, but from its head protruded a large horn. Flames flickered off of its body as it shot toward Shangguan Xiu, radiating intense heat.

The severed heads surrounding Shangguan Xiu crackled and burned from the heat, and some of them even began to roll in his direction. He laughed, slapping his bag of holding and producing a five-colored banner. The massive banner unfurled and a five-colored mist roiled out from within it. The mist then transformed into five mist spirits, each of them several meters tall. With hideous grins, they charged toward the Flame Python.

A massive explosion occurred, smashing nearby boulders into dust and reducing the surrounding trees and rattan vines of Mount Daqing into powder. Dust and ash swirled in the air, making the scene somewhat blurry.

Amidst the haze, Meng Hao dashed forward at incredible speed. The remaining severed heads which had not been incinerated continued to tumble toward Shangguan Xiu. His eyes flashed, and his fingers flickered in an incantation sign. Then he shoved his hands out in front of him.

"Five-colored Death!" he shouted, and a shrill shrieking sound suddenly rose up around him. Meng Hao smacked his bag of holding. The scroll painting appeared in his hand. He unrolled it, and six beasts leaped out, howling.

A massive thunderous rumble surrounded them. Meng Hao charged toward Shangguan Xiu, whose cold eyes flickered radiantly. Shangguan Xiu moved forward as well. More severed heads were crushed into pulp.

"Do you know what the Reliance Sect was called before Patriarch Reliance?" said Shangguan Xiu coolly. "It was called the Demon Sealing Sect!" He suddenly looked toward the peak of Mount Daqing and stamped

his foot down. Mount Daqing began to rumble, and then suddenly, an impossible-to-describe Qi force poured out from within the mountain. It was only a strand, yet that strand seemed to quiver with the very power of heaven and earth. It was not sentient, but rather, under the control of Shangguan Xiu. It roiled up from the ground beneath Meng Hao's feet.

Shangguan Xiu suddenly seemed to grow older, as if he had aged ten years. He looked almost like a corpse that had crawled its way out of the grave.

Clearly the magical technique he had just used was extremely difficult to employ, and required a sacrifice of longevity. Originally, he would never have used it, but seeing the level of Meng Hao's Cultivation base, he decided that he had no other choice. He wanted to bring about a swift end to the battle. After all, all the Cultivators in the State of Zhao were hunting Meng Hao right now.

This battle would surely attract their attention. If he could end the fight quickly, then he would have plenty of time to get his hands on the treasure he sought.

"The Demon Sealing Sect sought out the great Demons of the world, sealed them, released their spirit, and took their power to trample on the Heavens! You just entered the ninth level of Qi Condensation, what could you possibly use to fight me with? If I wanted, I could have established my Foundation fifty years ago!" As Shangguan Xiu spoke, Meng Hao waved the scroll painting, using it to resist the strand of Qi that had burst out around his feet.

But as soon as the scroll painting touched the Qi, an explosion rang out, and cracks appeared on its surface as it was thrown violently away. The Qi strand shot toward Meng Hao.

There was a bang, and Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood. The feathered fan had appeared in front of him in the blink of an eye to shield him. Cracks split the feathers, as Meng Hao took advantage of the moment to evade. Evade he did, but he was still sent tumbling backward, coughing up three mouthfuls of blood.

Only one move had been made, and Meng Hao was already injured. It was clear that Shangguan Xiu possessed unfathomable secrets. He laughed coldly. He had expended some of his longevity to make this attack. Even though it hadn't killed Meng Hao outright, Shangguan Xiu was still determined to win. He walked forward, stepping over the smashed, bloody remains of the severed heads.

Meng Hao's mouth was filled with blood, but his eyes shone with viciousness. At the same moment that Shangguan Xiu began to walk forward, Meng Hao lifted his hand, and within the pulp of the severed head, a black Qi arose. In an instant, the Qi coalesced into a black scorpion. It moved like lightning, so quickly that Shangguan Xiu had no time to pull back his foot, nor to leap away. The scorpion's stinger sank into the flesh of Shangguan Xiu's foot.

As the stinger sank in, the scorpion turned into strands of blackness which poured into Shangguan Xiu.

His face twisted. This turn of events was too sudden and unpredictable. The scorpion, of course, was from the rare magical pill that he had acquired that day from Qian and Lu from the Violet Fate Sect. This magical scorpion was hyper toxic!

The black Qi entered Shangguan Xiu's foot, and then merged into his Qi passageways, filling his entire body in an instant. His face turned black and he spit up a mouthful of black-colored blood, which stank like rotten fish.

"What poison is this!?" said Shangguan Xiu, his expression shocked as he retreated. A feeling of weakness spread through him like floodwaters. Knowing he had little time to think, he slapped his bag of holding and produced a medicinal pill, which he swallowed.

Meng Hao had planned things well to make a move in a moment just such as this. Even his three mouthfuls of blood had been coughed up intentionally, all to make Shangguan Xiu think that he had the upper hand. As soon as his opponent retreated and pulled out a medicinal pill, Meng Hao charged forward. He smacked his bag of holding, and the black

net shot forth, threatening to envelop Shangguan Xiu.

It takes longer to describe what was happening than the actual time it took to happen. Shangguan Xiu's expression flickered as he downed the medicinal pill. His fingers began to flicker in an incantation, even as the net began to cover him. Meng Hao moved forward without pause. The black, wooden bow appeared in his hand, and he pulled back on the bowstring, then sent an arrow screaming toward Shangguan Xiu.

Shangguan Xiu moved backward at high speed. A medicinal pill, a black net, an arrow and an incantation. He didn't have time for all, he would have to pick two.

A booming sound rang out. Shangguan Xiu downed the pill, but abandoned his incantation. He managed to evade the black net, but couldn't avoid the arrow. It shot into his right shoulder, emerging from the other side in a shower of blackened blood.

Intense pain flashed through him, but Shangguan Xiu let out a low snort. Meng Hao didn't pause for even a moment. A second arrow whistled forth, followed by a third and a fourth. Meng Hao moved forward relentlessly. Every step he took, he shot an arrow; seven steps, seven arrows.

The seven arrows shot forward, screaming through the air with shocking killing intent!

Shangguan Xiu continued to retreat, struggling to control the spread of the black strands throughout his body. And yet, he also had to dodge the incoming arrows. But being at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he could only do so much. He might be at the absolute peak of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, a hair away from the Foundation Establishment stage, but he was still not at the Foundation Establishment stage.

No, he was still far from Foundation Establishment stage. Just like Meng Hao, he was still in the Qi Condensation stage. The difference in the level of power between the two was like the difference between the sky and the ground.

He couldn't do everything perfectly at the same time. A booming sound

reverberated through the air as the seven arrows pierced his right arm, completely destroying it. This was the only thing he could do to defend against the arrows. He paid the price of a right arm in order to be able to focus on bringing the poison in his body under control temporarily.

Even as he did so, an eighth arrow shot toward him from Meng Hao, then a ninth. He raised his head to the sky and howled.

From the day he began to walk the path of Cultivation until today, he had never been in such a dangerous, tight situation. He had lost an arm! The price he had paid, the pain he felt, drove his desire to kill Meng Hao to a new, intense height.

His eyes were bloodshot; the poison was under control, but could not easily be expelled. In fact, as of now, he could tell that it would be impossible to expel the poison while he was in the Qi Condensation stage. Only if he established his Foundation could he do so.

“Milky Way Sea!” he shouted, his hair flying about him crazily. He bit the tip of his tongue and spit out a glob of blood. A violet pearl flew out from within the blood, within which could be seen what appeared to be a seething mass of wind. As soon as it appeared, a fierce gale arose, sending Meng Hao’s latest three arrows into a spin. Then, they simply collapsed into pieces.

Chapter 74: Not Past One Hundred Years

The pearl spun back into Shangguan Xiu's mouth, whereupon he used his remaining arm to slap his bag of holding. Multiple flying swords, banners and other magical items appeared, all flying forward at the same time. Then, one by one they exploded into pieces. Shangguan Xiu lifted his hands, and the fragments of the various magical items rose up to create something like a sea.

From a distance, the multiple fragments glinted blindingly, making it seem as if there really was a sea floating in the sky. The sea began to spin, and then shot directly toward Meng Hao, whistling through the air.

This was the Milky Way Sea, a magical technique that had earned Patriarch Milky Way his name many years ago. Eventually, he divided the technique into multiple levels. The lowest level could be used only by someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

Of course, any Cultivator of the Foundation Establishment stage could flick a sleeve and create a Milky Way Sea out of fragmented items. However, during the Qi Condensation stage, this was truly something powerful.

As such, it was not an easy technique to pull off. Only someone at the peak of the ninth level could do it, and they would have to have the support of a vast amount of spiritual power. In all of Milky Way City, Shangguan Xiu was the only Cultivator at the Qi Condensation stage who could do it.

At the moment, he wanted to end the fight as quickly as possible, not only to acquire Meng Hao's treasures, but also to get back to Milky Way City to dispel the poison from his body. So, he attacked with his most powerful technique, sending the cloud of fragmented treasures speeding toward Meng Hao. As it approached, Meng Hao took a deep breath and then slapped his bag of holding.

Flying sword after flying sword emerged. Ten swords, fifty, one hundred, until a total of three hundred flying swords were spinning around him.

Meng Hao lifted his hands, then pushed them out ahead of him.

As he did, the three hundred flying swords formed a massive Sword Rain, which then congealed into the shape of a Flying Rain-Dragon. He walked forward, and two golden strands of light appeared in his hands, the two wooden swords. His body turned into a beam of light as he flew up into the Flying Rain-Dragon Sword Rain.

It was as if he had become the spirit of the flying-sword Flying Rain-Dragon. It raised its head to the Heavens and roared, then shot toward the Milky Way Sea.

An explosion reverberated out which shook heaven and earth. The Milky Way Sea of fragmented treasures lashed against Meng Hao's flying swords. Popping sounds could be heard as sword after sword collapsed into pieces. But if the Sea smashed ten swords, then Meng Hao would produce ten more to replace them.

Right now, the most flying swords he could control simultaneously was three hundred. Within his bag of holding, he currently had about seven hundred, which he had slowly duplicated over the last year. After his fierce battle with Ding Yan, and during the process of breaking through to the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he had prepared himself completely.

Seeing this, Shangguan Xiu's face changed. His left hand flickered in an incantation pattern, then produced more magical items which he added to the conglomeration.

Meng Hao's flying swords screamed as they continuously battered the Milky Way Sea. The sound of it reverberated out in all directions, and yet the power of this Milky Way Sea was formidable. At the moment, he wasn't able to move forward very easily. Suddenly, he spun his body, causing the flying swords around him to begin to rotate around him. They rotated faster and faster until they became a whirlwind, with Meng Hao at the center. He stopped moving, but the flying sword whirlwind continued to spin faster and faster.

From a distance, it looked as if a rapidly spinning tornado were slicing through the middle of the Milky Way Sea. The fragmented treasure items

of the Milky Way Sea continue to smash against the flying swords, but after the space of a few breaths, the swords pushed forward, slicing clean through the sea.

Shangguan Xiu's face twisted. Meng Hao's Cultivation base was shocking, as was the number of magical items he had. The most shocking thing, though, was his battle experience. His ability to quickly change his magical battle techniques was something that left Shangguan Xiu in utter disbelief.

Amidst the reverberating roar, Meng Hao and his Sword Rain ploughed through the Milky Way Sea, sending pieces of it scattering about. Meng Hao suddenly leaped forward, the two golden strands that were the wooden swords emitting shrill whistles as they shot through the air with him. Shock covered Shangguan Xiu's face.

"Meng Hao!" he cried, shooting backward as fast as possible, his face panic-stricken. In complete contrast, when Meng Hao attacked, he didn't say even a word. His expression was the same as ever. He increased his speed even more, aiming the two wooden swords, one to stab directly toward his opponent's heart, the other, the spot between his eyebrows.

Shangguan Xiu was vexed to the extreme. He had held the upper hand at first, but had then been poisoned. Things had only gone downhill from there. He couldn't dispel the poison, which meant he couldn't use the full power of his Cultivation base. He constantly needed to use some of his power to suppress the effects of the poison. Now, he was forced to retreat, one step at a time.

His hand flashing, Shangguan Xiu smacked his chest; he coughed up a mouthful of blood, amidst which was the pearl that had appeared a moment ago. A curving arc of light appeared, shooting forward to block the two wooden swords. The shield immediately began to tremor, and then shattered, shoving Shangguan Xiu backward even faster as he retreated.

Seeing the shield shattering, Shangguan Xiu quickly said, "Meng Hao, let's stop here. The three great Sects are looking for you, and our fight today will surely have attracted their attention. They could arrive at any

moment. I won't harm the inhabitants of the three counties. Let's abandon our enmity, what do you say?"

Meng Hao didn't respond. His spiritual energy soared, and the wooden swords glowed, pushing through the shield. Shangguan Xiu was now extremely alarmed. With a howl, he waved his arm, pointing down toward the bottom of the mountain.

"If you keep going, I will exterminate the people of the three counties!"

"Little Tiger!" shouted Meng Hao. This was the second time he had spoken during the battle.

As his shout echoed out, a twinkling, blood-red color could be seen at the bottom of the mountain. A head-sized Blood Globe appeared. It began to expand, as if it were about to explode. An emaciated figure appeared; it was none other than Little Tiger. His jaw was clenched, and he held a pearl outstretched in his hands.

The pearl shot out toward the Blood Globe, spinning around it rapidly to form a restrictive barrier that caused the blood to stop expanding.

"Meng Hao, I can only hold on for the time it takes an incense stick to burn!" Having said this, Little Tiger coughed up a mouthful of blood, then sat down cross-legged to meditate.

Seeing this happen caused Shangguan Xiu's face to flicker with more emotions. But he didn't have time to do anything more. With a boom, the shield collapsed and Shangguan Xiu's pearl shattered. The wooden swords advanced again, Meng Hao behind them, his killing intent rising to the heavens.

Blood sprayed from Shangguan Xiu's mouth, and he lost control of the poison in his body. It exploded out, threatening to send him into unconsciousness. He continued to retreat, a sad smile on his face.

"The Heavens will give me no aid...." he said with a bitter laugh. "Meng Hao, I will not lose this battle. And you... I vow that I will smash your Qi passageways!" His smile seemed to contain intense discontent along with complete helplessness. But it did not contain despair. However, the

discontent and helplessness created an air darker than any despair.

His left hand smacked his bag of holding. Ignoring the incoming wooden swords, he held up a medicinal pill. As soon as it appeared, the nearby spiritual energy seemed to surge, and a strong medicinal aroma filled the air. With a bitter laugh, he swallowed the pill.

When he saw the pill, Meng Hao's eyes narrowed. It was amber-colored, and was none other than a Foundation Establishment Pill. Inscribed on its surface was a seal; this pill was the exact same Foundation Establishment Pill he had sold at Milky Way City.

"I, Shangguan Xiu, reached the first level of Qi Condensation when I was seven years old," he muttered to himself. "At thirty, I was at the sixth level. By thirty-nine, I was the ninth level. Today, I'm ninety-nine years old...." He didn't even look at Meng Hao, but instead stared up into the sky. In an instant, the power within his body surged. He didn't move, of course; he wouldn't be able to until the Foundation Establishment Pill had been fully absorbed.

However, even though this was a weakness, the power in his body was immense, already much more than that of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. As he soared toward Foundation Establishment, the two wooden swords slowly came to a stop about seven inches from his body.

Meng Hao's expression changed. He could sense his opponent's Qi growing stronger and stronger. He was establishing his Foundation right here on Mount Daqing. If Meng Hao's expression changed, then Little Tiger's changed even more.

"I could have established my Foundation fifty years ago," said Shangguan Xiu, a dark expression on his face, his appearance wild. "But I didn't want to. I didn't want a Flawless Foundation. I've been planning for fifty years to establish a world-shaking Foundation that would surpass a Flawless Foundation! I wanted a Perfect Foundation. But today.... Sadly, today I've been wounded and poisoned. If I don't reach Foundation Establishment, then I will surely die. Fifty years of preparations, and the last step... ruined by you! Meng Hao, do you know how much I hate you!?" Shangguan Xiu

lowered his head and stared at Meng Hao. He did not grind his teeth or howl. His face was calm, and yet his eyes were filled with an intense hatred that was clearly carved into his bones and onto his heart.

Meng Hao's heart began to race, and he felt the shadow of death upon him. But he didn't retreat. His eyes flashing, he thought back to his own experience consuming the Foundation Establishment pill. He hadn't been able to move for two months.

"I was at the eighth level of Qi Condensation, so it took me two months," thought Meng Hao. "Shangguan Xiu has been at the peak of the ninth level for fifty years, he will be able to absorb the energy much faster. But, there has to be a way!" His eyes glittering, he produced a Plateau Charging Pill and popped it into his mouth. As the spiritual energy billowed outing his body, he waved his hands toward the two wooden swords.

With a rumbling sound, the two wooden swords trembled and then began to emit a powerful air. Slowly but surely they moved closer to Shangguan Xiu. They were about three inches away from him when they slowly grounded to a halt. This was Meng Hao's limit. He didn't have enough spiritual power, and just couldn't make the swords move any further.

"You don't know your own limitations," said Shangguan Xiu with a cold laugh. "I could have established my Foundation fifty years ago. With the profundity of my Cultivation base, I will be able to absorb the Foundation Establishment Pill in less than an hour. You'd best do whatever you can now to flee. But even if you run to the edges of the earth, I can tell you now, you're dead." He stared at Meng Hao, his hatred conjuring up hundreds of ways to kill Meng Hao.

Chapter 75: An Ancient Path Appears Again!

Meng Hao's face was grim. He looked at the two wooden swords, which hovered three inches away from Shangguan Xiu. Those three inches were like a massive ravine that Meng Hao could not cross with his current Cultivation base.

As for Shangguan Xiu, at the moment, he couldn't really be considered a Qi Condensation Cultivator. Although he was still some distance from Foundation Establishment, Dao pillars were forming within his Core Lake. As of this moment, despite the fact that Meng Hao was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he was so weak compared to Shangguan Xiu that he wouldn't be able to withstand a single blow.

The gap between the Foundation Establishment stage and the Qi Condensation stage is like that between the sky and the ground, and is something that will never change. With the exception of some unexpected event which goes against the will of the Heavens, it would be impossible for someone of the Qi Condensation stage to kill someone of the Foundation Establishment stage.

A contest between the two would be like a fight between an infant and a strong man. Even if the strong man were weakened somehow, he could still slay the infant with the movement of a hand.

Today, Meng Hao had little more than an hour before a Foundation Establishment Cultivator appeared in front of him. His chances were already small, but at that time, he would have no chance at all.

Time slipped by, and the shadow of death grew closer. Even if he fled, in a very short time, it wouldn't matter where he went, even if it were to the remotest corner of the Milky Way Sea, he would still be unable to evade death.

"What should I do...." Meng Hao's eyes were bloodshot. He wasn't the only nervous one. Down at the bottom of the mountain, Little Tiger's face

was growing pale. Seeing the developments just now, he gritted his teeth.

“Meng Hao!” he shouted. His fingers flickered with an incantation, and then he pushed down on his chest. He spat up a massive amount of blood, which flew out in front of him and then formed into a handful of red-colored clouds. “This pearl is my life, allow me to offer some assistance.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he collapsed into unconsciousness. The pearl sucked Little Tiger’s blood cloud into it and then began to shine with a red glow. It circulated a few more times around the Blood Globe, but then suddenly shot toward Meng Hao. When it reached him, the glow intensified, enveloping Meng Hao with its light.

At that moment, a strange sensation filled Meng Hao’s heart. It felt as if his Cultivation base were suddenly climbing higher!

His golden Core Sea began to roar as it expanded. Within an instant, it had suddenly doubled in size. Its boundlessness increased so much so that it felt as if it would explode out of his body.

Meng Hao body suddenly shined with a golden light, making him look completely extraordinary.

The Demonic Core within him did not undulate, but instead began to spin rapidly. As it did, intense spiritual power flooded through Meng Hao’s body, filling his mind with a thunderous roar, and ... a thread of Qi!

The Qi was weak, just like the thread he had felt when he reached the first level of Qi Condensation.

What Meng Hao didn’t know, was that this strand of Qi in his mind was actually something that only Foundation Establishment Cultivators should possess; Spiritual Sense!

Even Shangguan Xiu couldn’t develop it, because he hadn’t completely passed into the Foundation Establishment stage.

And yet, Meng Hao hadn’t passed into Foundation Establishment either. Instead, he had reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation! Popping sounds rang out through his body. Vast quantities of filth were pushed out through his pores as he experienced a sort of baptism into a higher layer

of Qi Condensation than anyone else in the world.

The tenth level of Qi Condensation!

Meng Hao's head spun. In the blink of an eye, his body was much tougher and stronger. Not only had he developed Spiritual Sense, but his body has miraculously grown much more powerful.

In the Cultivation world, the tenth level of Qi Condensation was something rarely seen. In fact, throughout the years, many of the most powerful members of a given generation had done research about the Qi Condensation stage... to determine whether there really even was a tenth level, an eleventh level and a twelfth level.

Theoretically speaking it was possible; in some ancient text fragments these levels were mentioned. Supposedly, in ancient times, there were a total of thirteen levels in the Qi Condensation stage! According to the legends, even in ancient times, it was rare for someone to reach the tenth level, and even more rare the eleventh level. Any person who reached that level inevitably went on to rock the world.

In the modern Cultivation world, the tenth level of Qi Condensation was nothing more than a legend.

Over the years, generation after generation of Cultivators had researched it and eventually a consensus had been reached. In ancient times, there had been thirteen levels of Qi Condensation. But, the ninth level had been set as a limit. The tenth level and beyond had been crippled in accordance with the will of the Heavens. From that time on, there were only nine levels!

There was another opinion, rejected by most as being absurd, that the ancient will of the Heavens was dead, and that a new will of the Heavens had arisen. The new will of the Heavens only approved of nine levels of Qi Condensation, and had thus broken the path of the tenth level. This was because following the path of the tenth level allowed one to fight against the Heavens, which was prohibited.

If a Cultivator could accumulate enough spiritual energy of heaven and earth, then they could once again forge the path to reach the fabled tenth

level of Qi Condensation of ancient times!

The path was the focal point. Unfortunately, that path had been broken since ancient times, and though it still existed, was essentially broken beyond all repair.

But today it appeared in Meng Hao's body, visible not only to him, but also to a dumbfounded Shangguan Xiu. How could he possibly believe that right there in front of him, Meng Hao... had actually entered into the legendary tenth level of Qi condensation?

"Impossible... the tenth level of Qi Condensation is just a legend." Shangguan Xiu's face was filled with disbelief. "According to the stories, the tenth level of Qi Condensation is a body-strengthening stage... It exists in theory, and even in ancient times, it was rare for it to be achieved.... Impossible!"

Were Little Tiger not unconscious, he would also be shocked. Even though the pearl was his, and was composed of his life force, it had never had such a shocking effect on him. Whatever level he was at, it allowed him to wield a level of power equal to half of the following level. For example, now he was at the fifth level of Qi Condensation, but in terms of power, he was already half way through the sixth level.

Meng Hao's hair flew about wildly and his eyes glowed brightly. He took a deep breath, feeling the immense power that surged through him. He felt the thread of Qi in his mind, as well as the strength rippling through his muscles and blood. He knew that as of now, he wasn't in the least bit weak.

And yet, there was a side-effect. As soon as he reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation, it seemed as if the Heavens immediately severed any connection to him. He couldn't sense any of the power of heaven and earth, as if he had been completely cut off. He felt a wild sucking feeling within him, as if he were a newborn child who needed nutrients... but was denied.

At the moment, his body still appeared to be that of a weak scholar, but in reality, his flesh was filled with enough strength that he felt as if he

could rip a city wall in half.

Right now, there wasn't time to consider all of this, though. His eyes flashed as he looked Shangguan Xiu and the disbelief written on the man's face. Meng Hao took in a deep breath and then lifted up his right hand, pointing his finger toward the wooden swords.

This finger strike contained all the power of Meng Hao's tenth level of Qi Condensation, all of his Spiritual Sight, all of the strength of his physical body.

This was Meng Hao's most powerful attack. In fact, this was probably the most powerful attack than any Qi Condensation stage Cultivator in the State of Zhao could muster.

A boom rang out as he tapped the wooden sword. It erupted with sword might, piercing through the three-inch gap and stabbing deeply into Shangguan Xiu's chest. A bang sounded out as it stabbed completely through his chest, emerging from the other side in a shower of blood.

Shangguan Xiu's body shook, and yet he couldn't move. His eyes filled with dread as he sensed massive amounts of spiritual energy flooding out from the wound. In the blink of an eye, the energy seepage had caught up with this Foundation Establishment. Now the time it would take to reach the Foundation Establishment stage was much, much longer.

It was at this time that Meng Hao's hand lifted up again, and tapped the other wooden sword. It hummed as it proceeded forward toward Shangguan Xiu's neck.

"Meng Hao, you don't dare to kill me...." Shangguan Xiu was completely in a panic now. His previous cold arrogance and killing intent had vanished, replaced with a desperate struggle to evade death.

Meng Hao said nothing. His eyes glowing darkly as the sword he had just tapped passed through the three-inch gap and stabbed into Shangguan Xiu's neck. In the instant that it pierced into his neck, Shangguan Xiu suddenly twisted his head to the side in an impossible fashion. The wooden sword sliced open a massive wound which erupted with blood, and yet it didn't kill him.

Dread permeated Shangguan Xiu. He could feel his life force beginning to fade and his spiritual power dissipating. As the spiritual energy poured out of him, his body was beginning to grow a bit more responsive.

“Meng Hao, there’s no hatred between us that can’t be resolved. If you let me go, I will give you the Sublime Spirit Scripture...” Shangguan Xiu couldn’t be any more terrified. Even before he finished speaking, the two wooden swords circled back, stabbing back through his chest, showering blood everywhere. Shangguan Xiu let out a blood-curdling scream filled with weakness and despair.

Meng Hao didn’t care in the least bit when he mentioned the Sublime Spirit Scripture. His eyes were as hard as ever; it didn’t matter what Shangguan Xiu said, he wouldn’t stop until he was utterly and completely dead.

This was Meng Hao. Once he made a decision, he wouldn’t change his mind easily.

Chapter 76: Beyond Flawlessness

The two wooden swords circled around, emitting a shocking sword aura. They sped toward Shangguan Xiu's head, one from the left, one from the right, carrying Meng Hao's killing intent with them. This time, it was clear that Shangguan Xiu would not be able to evade.

"There is something more precious than a Flawless Foundation," shrieked Shangguan Xiu in a piercing voice. "It's something that in the Southern Domain, in fact in all the four continents, is a hundred thousand times more rare than your tenth level of Qi Condensation. I'm talking about a Perfect Foundation!! Meng Hao, you...." Then Meng Hao's two swords stabbed into his head, sending fountains of blood in all directions.

Shangguan Xiu died instantly. He had not lived past one hundred years, but rather, had died feeling infinite grievance.

His non-reconciliation to death was due to his great plans, and due to the fact that he was in the middle of establishing his Foundation. But then his head exploded, and his body dropped down off of Mount Daqing and splashed into the river below. His aspirations, and his body, floated away into the distance.

Meng Hao snatched his dark green bag of holding as he fell. He didn't look at it, but instead tucked it into his robe.

He panted. Despite having reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation, he had just wielded the two wooden swords to slay someone who was on the verge of reaching Foundation Establishment. He now felt extremely drained.

He watched Shangguan Xiu's body disappear in the distance, and then turned and hopped onto a wooden sword. His body transformed into a beam of light, and he shot down the mountain to where Little Tiger lay unconscious.

The boy's face was as pale as death, and his eyes were tightly shut. The Qi in his body was like gossamer threads, and his life force flickered like a tiny flame that could be extinguished at any moment.

Meng Hao looked at Little Tiger thoughtfully, and then glanced at the pearl which floated in the air next to him. The power of the pearl was shocking to the extreme, and was truly a treasure. Its power could even be compared to that of the copper mirror.

“To duplicate it would cost an astronomical amount of Spirit Stones... what a pity.” Meng Hao sighed and looked up into the sky.

He'd known from the beginning that the pearl was linked to Little Tiger's life force. If he stole it, then Little Tiger would die.

“You entrusted me with your life. How could I, Meng Hao, act the villain? If I did, it would plague my conscience for the rest of my days. I would never be able to think clearly, and my days of Cultivating would come to an end.” His eyes glittering, he flicked his sleeve, and tapped Little Tiger between the eyebrows.

Little Tiger's body spasmed, then his eyes snapped open. He was instantly on guard, getting to his feet and retreating backward several paces. He glanced at the pearl in Meng Hao's hands, and his body began to shiver slightly. A look of despair crept into his eyes.

Meng Hao lifted the pearl with a finger, causing it to shoot straight toward Little Tiger, who snatched it out of the air. A complex expression filled his face, and he stared at Meng Hao blankly.

“Many thanks for your assistance. This treasure is astonishing. You need to be cautious and take care of yourself.” As soon as the pearl left his hand, Meng Hao's body began to grow weaker. The telltale signs of the tenth level of Qi Condensation began to disappear. As his Cultivation base dropped, the spiritual energy of heaven and earth which had just been cut off from him, slowly began to return.

The unbridled suction force within his body slowly vanished.

Meng Hao didn't regret his decision. There were some things that he just couldn't do. He refused to defy his own conscience in such a way.

The Blood Globe that Shangguan Xiu had used to threaten the lives of the people of the three counties was instantly smashed between Meng

Hao's fingers. It transformed into a vast amount of Blood Qi, which floated back toward the three counties.

As far as the common people went, all they knew was that for the past two months, they had felt somewhat dizzy, and now were much more clear headed. They also felt a bit weak. This was because, unbeknownst to them, their longevity had been damaged, and close to five years had been taken from the life spans.

Meng Hao could see this, but there was nothing he could do except sigh to himself. He flicked his sleeve and made to leave.

"Elder Brother Meng," said Little Tiger, "Shangguan Xiu...."

"There is no such person in the world anymore." He didn't look back, just continued off into the distance. The battle here would definitely attract the attention of the three great Sects. And Meng Hao could guess why they had permitted Shangguan Xiu to cast this massive spell here; it was because of Meng Hao. Shangguan Xiu wanted his bag of holding, and the three Great Sects wanted him. At the moment, he had no way to deal with the situation. The only thing he could do was go somewhere remote to hide and think for a while.

Little Tiger didn't say anything more. He watched Meng Hao leaving, and then a look of determination filled his eyes.

"Meng Hao, you didn't covet my most valuable treasure. I, Dong Hu, am not a good person. But you can rest easy. In this life, I will never do anything to let you down." He turned, casting his vision into the town far off in the distance. He caught sight of his father and mother, and a gentle look filled his eyes. Then the warmth vanished. Lowering his head, he quickly made his way off into the distance.

At that exact moment, the sky filled with countless beams of prismatic light. In the lead was none other than Liu Daoyun from the Cold Wind Sect.

"Meng Hao, you won't escape this time!"

Meng Hao frowned, turning into a flash of light as he sped off into the

distance. He used the last remaining vestiges of the power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation to instantly put a vast distance between himself and the pursuers. Far off in the distance, he had caught sight of more disciples of the three great Sects, and among them had been Foundation Establishment Cultivators and Core Formation Eccentrics. They had obviously been unwilling to show up themselves, and had instead sent some lower level disciples over to check things out. But now that Meng Hao's presence had been confirmed, they would surely make appearances.

"Shangguan Xiu was backed by Milky Way City. It seems that power was not small.... The three great Sects must have stayed away because that was their agreement. When they felt the battle magic disappear, then they could approach. Shangguan Xiu had his secrets, and didn't want people to see what was happening. He was even careful about the people from Milky Way City. He didn't let them know his true purposes either."

He left Mount Daqing, passing the North Sea and crossing the wide wilderness, heading in the direction of the Reliance Sect.

About half way through the wilderness, in a random mountain range, Meng Hao sped along at top speed, an indistinct expression on his face. As he raced along he would occasionally look down at a piece of turtle shell which he held in his hand. This was an item he had taken out of Shangguan Xiu's bag of holding.

It was about the size of his palm, and its edges were rough. Obviously it had been broken off from a larger turtle shell.

Its surface was inscribed with rows and rows of small characters. They were difficult to make out. Only by infusing his eyes with spiritual energy was he able to read them clearly.

"In the Cultivation world, it is possible to achieve the so-called... Perfect Foundation!" Meng Hao gasped.

On the surface of the turtle shell were two medicinal pill recipes. One was for a Perfect Foundation Pill, the other was for a Perfect Gold Core Pill.

"The turtle shell spells it out clearly. The Foundation Establishment

stage doesn't just have three types, the Flawless, Cracked and Fractured. There is a fourth type, the Perfect Foundation. It's extremely rare, being seen only one ten thousand cases...." Meng Hao breathed rapidly, staring down at the turtle shell and thinking back to what Shangguan Xiu had said before he died. Now he understood his opponent's regret at being forced to establish his Foundation after being poisoned. And now he understood the raging hatred in Shangguan Xiu's eyes.

Meng Hao contemplated things silently. He had read a lot about Foundation Establishment back in the Magic Pavilion of the Reliance Sect.

In Foundation Establishment, Dao pillars would come to being within the Core Lake. Because Foundation Establishment increased one's longevity, it was categorized as stealing luck and defying the Heavens. As a result, the Dao pillars could never be perfect, but would always contain cracks. This was in accordance with the Dao of the Heavens. It could be summed up in the expression, "you get some, you lose some" or perhaps "when something comes in, something goes out." It was part of the cycle of heaven and earth, and was permitted to exist.

When entering the Foundation Establishment stage, nine Dao pillars would appear, upon which cracks would develop. Based on the different types of Dao pillars, the different types of Foundations were named. A Flawless Foundation contained the least amount of cracks, and leaked the least amount of spiritual energy. After long periods of Tu Na breathing exercises, the body would become incredibly powerful, much more so than other Foundations.

In the modern Cultivation world, this was the most powerful Foundation type. The special methods to achieve it could only be found amidst the clues in the great classic scriptures, for example the Qi Condensation manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Such secrets could lead to horrific bloodbaths. In fact... that was why the Reliance Sect had been disbanded.

Without such a scripture, the only way to have a chance at establishing a Flawless Foundation was to have incredible latent talent or outstanding luck. Most often, it was a Chosen who could piece together the clues to do so.

If more than nine cracks appeared on the Dao pillars after achieving Foundation Establishment, this was called a Cracked Foundation. Although this type of Foundation was weaker than a Flawless Foundation, it could not be looked down upon. Usually, only disciples of the great Sects were able to achieve it.

Last, of course, was the Fractured Foundation. This was when, after establishing the Foundation, eighteen cracks appeared on the Dao pillars, which is too much. This Foundation could be considered nearly shattered. In terms of both Cultivation speed as well as battle prowess, both were much weaker. With this type of Foundation, the chances of forming a Core were much lower.

Meng Hao thought about all of this and then looked down at the turtle shell. According to the description here, by concocting and consuming a Perfect Foundation Pill, there was a high probability of establishing a Perfect Foundation. In this case, no cracks whatsoever would appear. This was a type of Cultivation that defied the Heavens, and was a path that could not be returned from.

Because this Foundation was not permitted by the Heavens, it would provoke Tribulation Lightning. True success required defiance of the Heavens. In this respect, it was similar to the tenth level of Qi Condensation.

“From what Shangguan Xiu said, it seems the tenth level of Qi Condensation is not tolerated by the Heavens. Apparently, establishing a Perfect Foundation is the same...”

“If you have a Fractured Foundation and then consume this pill, you have a ten percent chance of establishing a Perfect Foundation. With a Cracked Foundation, you have a thirty percent chance, and with a Flawless Foundation, a sixty percent chance. The pill repairs the cracks, enabling you to establish a Perfect Foundation. But... you have to be particular about when you consume the pill. The sooner you take it after Foundation Establishment, the better. If too much time passes, the effectiveness will be reduced. And it takes two months to concoct the Perfect Foundation Pill.” Meng Hao’s heart raced as he sped along.

“No wonder Shangguan Xiu wanted to join the Reliance Sect... Just like Wang Tengfei, he wanted a chance to get the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture! After establishing a Flawless Foundation, his chances would be much higher... It’s also no wonder he disappeared on the day the Sect was disbanded. With secrets like this on his person, he didn’t dare to show his face...” Meng Hao clutched the turtle shell tightly in hand, continuing to race forward.

In addition to the turtle shell, Shangguan Xiu’s bag of holding also contained a small pill furnace fashioned from translucent green crystal, about the size of a hand. He also had large quantities of medicinal herbs, all of them placed in jade boxes. There were hundreds of different types.

Many of the medicinal herbs were unfamiliar to Meng Hao, but thankfully, there was also a jade slip in the bag of holding with complete records regarding identification methods for all of the herbs. Perusing this, Meng Hao grew more and more excited.

Chapter 77: Lord Revelation

Although these medicinal herbs were not heavenly material or earthly treasures, they were still rare. Many Cultivators would spend decades attempting to collect them.

And yet here in Shangguan Xiu's bag of holding were hundreds.

There were also two medicinal pills placed inside of jade boxes, one orange and one blue. Obviously, they were extremely valuable.

"These herbs are all materials needed to create a Perfect Foundation Pill... As for these medicinal pills..." After examining them thoroughly, he looked again at the turtle shell, eyes shining.

"Concocting the Perfect Foundation Pill requires seven minor pills. These are two of those seven that Shangguan Xiu already concocted." Meng Hao understood things now, but was still a bit shocked. Shangguan Xiu had spent fifty years collecting all of these things together, and yet that was still not enough time for him, a Cultivator of the Qi Condensation phase.

"And he was even backed by Milky Way City...."

Meng Hao felt that there were still things he didn't quite understand, though. In order to concoct the Perfect Foundation Pill, it seemed Shangguan Xiu had secretly taken items from Patriarch Milky Way's treasure storehouse, as well as items accumulated over hundreds of years by his clan. In addition, he had scoured the lands, all to collect these items together.

And yet, he still lacked a few necessary medicinal materials. He had one stem of a particularly rare herb, but required three. At long last, Meng Hao understood the insanity with which Shangguan Xiu had pursued him in his attempt to acquire the copper mirror.

In the end, he had delivered all his fortunes directly into Meng Hao's hands. If Shangguan Xiu had known this would happen, he never would have caused problems for Meng Hao. But he had, and his fifty years of

preparations were irrevocably lost.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, placing the turtle shell and the medicinal materials into the bag of holding, which he then placed, along with his other bags of holding, into the bag of the Cosmos.

He stood there in the forest and looked up at the sky. His eyes slowly began to shine as he thought about the Perfect Foundation. His heart pounded.

“After consuming the pill, Tribulation Lightning will fall. I shouldn’t even be thinking about a Perfect Foundation right now. I can make a decision about it after I establish my Foundation. What I need to think about now is the matter between the three great Sects and Patriarch Reliance.” He closed his eyes and took a few breaths, pushing down all the anxious thoughts. When he opened his eyes again, they were calm

“A year has already passed, and the time set by Patriarch Reliance has arrived. He promised that if I could gather the experts of the State of Zhao here, he would give me a handsome reward...” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered.

“But to do such a thing would be very dangerous.” He frowned, hesitating. “My Cultivation base is at the Qi Condensation stage. I would be like an egg thrown up against rocks.”

“I probably shouldn’t get involved. After all, Patriarch Reliance said a year later, but didn’t give a specific date. When my Cultivation base is a bit higher, maybe after I establish my Foundation, then I can think about it. At that time I’ll be in a bit of a safer position.” He lifted his head. Ever since the time Patriarch Reliance had suddenly caused the three-colored spear to disappear, he had lost a little bit of his faith in the Patriarch’s trustworthiness.

“However, because of the arrest warrant of the three great Sects, their disciples are looking for me everywhere. If I get in a tight spot, then I’ll just have to face the danger and lead them into the Patriarch’s meditation zone.” Meng Hao raced on silently through the wild mountains, his decision having been made.

But even as he raced forward, he suddenly felt a strange, jittery

sensation. His heart lurched, as if a giant, invisible hand had just passed through his chest and squeezed his heart.

He suddenly felt as if all of the vegetation around him had eyes that were staring at him coldly.

The feeling passed almost immediately. Even though the feeling was no longer there, Meng Hao's face was pale. He looked around. Everything was silent, and nothing around him gave any clue as to what had happened. Had it been his imagination?

"What was that?" he thought, hesitating. After a moment, though, his eyes glittered, and he shot forward at top speed.

Meanwhile, somewhere very far away from Meng Hao but still in the State of Zhao, an old man in a purplish blue robe sat cross-legged on a mountain. His eyes were closed, but his right hand flickered as if he were performing an incantation. His eyes opened slowly and he looked off into the distance.

"There you are," he said coolly. "The three Sects wanted to hide you from me. How laughable." He took a step forward, and then disappeared.

At the same moment, Liu Daoyun was speeding along. Meng Hao had lost him, but he'd seen where Meng Hao had entered the mountains. He had followed in pursuit, his face filled with incredible hatred and murder.

His hatred for Meng Hao reached down his bones. The bloody incident of the silver spear had turned him into the butt of all the jokes of the State of Zhao and had nearly caused a war between two of the great Sects. Even though the war had been averted, he had paid a heavy price for his actions.

It nearly drove him insane to think about the day he had been brought up before the Elders of the great Sects. He had been bound on the Sealing Pole, then lashed with a Fire Whip over one hundred times. Oh, the misery and pain!

The lashes had torn his skin and left the flesh gaping. The pain had stabbed down into his bones. Even to this day, he would often wake in the

middle of the night, and every time he did, his desire to kill Meng Hao grew stronger and stronger.

Unlike everyone else who was chasing Meng Hao, he did not plan to capture him. He would kill him!

It might arouse the displeasure of his Sect, but he had already decided to forsake them. At worst, he would flee the State of Zhao after killing Meng Hao. The Southern Domain was large, and filled with countries of Cultivators, especially in the center. As a Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he would surely be able to find somewhere willing to take him in. Then one day he would come back to the State of Zhao and wipe out the Cold Wind Sect. He would cleanse the pain of his lashing with blood.

At the moment, he moved at top speed, using all the power he could muster. He was determined to find Meng Hao and kill him before the Sect's Foundation Establishment experts and Core Formation Patriarchs arrived.

"Meng Hao, you can try to run, but there's nowhere to run to!" Liu Daoyun's killing intent soared. He was even more confident of being able to kill Meng Hao when he thought of the astonishing treasure he had borrowed.

He stood on his crystalline sword as he entered the mountains. His gaze swept back and forth. Because he was of the ninth level of Qi Cultivation, and also an Inner Sect disciple, he had a voice transmission jade slip, which he used to inform all disciples in the area to notify him immediately if they saw Meng Hao.

A short time passed. As he soared along in the air, Liu Daoyun suddenly slapped his bag of holding, and a glowing jade slip appeared in his hand. He pressed it to his face between his eyebrows and then laughed. He changed his course, shooting off toward the disciple who had just contacted him.

Time passed enough for half an incense stick to burn. It was then that Liu Daoyun caught sight of Meng Hao, moving forward on his treasured

fan. Yes, this was the man who had killed a Cold Wind Sect disciple in one move by piercing his head.

At this same moment, Meng Hao looked back, and his cold eyes caught sight of Liu Daoyun. He frowned to himself. Ever since he had experienced the sensation of an invisible hand squeezing his heart, he had felt that he was being watched. Sure enough, after a while, he noticed that there were quite a few Cultivators around from the three great Sects.

There was no way to avoid them. Even if he attacked and killed them as quickly as possible, the word would surely spread via jade slips.

“Meng Hao!” shouted Liu Daoyun. His right hand flickered in an incantation pattern, and immediately, the flying sword beneath his feet issued a droning sound and shot toward Meng Hao.

“Let’s see you run away this time! I, Liu, will rip you to pieces today! That is the only way I can resolve the hatred in my heart!” Liu Daoyun’s eyes had grown red as soon as he caught sight of Meng Hao, and his killing intent grew even fiercer.

Meng Hao’s eyes flashed, and he was about to continue on forward when suddenly his mind trembled. A bit of Spiritual Sense still remained, which caused Meng Hao to suddenly move backward. Even as the flying sword approached him, a fierce wind arose, sending the crystalline sword spinning away.

At the same time, an old man suddenly appeared. He wore a purplish-blue robe, and had some age spots on his face, but his eyes shined with a fear-inspiring might that could make one’s spirit tremble.

His eyes seemed to contain the sun, moon and stars, making it seem as if you might be lost if you looked into them. A strange design was stitched onto his blue robe; it appeared to be an altar, in the middle of which was a solitary eye. This eye seemed to be filled with even more woe than the old man’s eyes.

“Such strong grievances,” he said coolly, looking at Liu Daoyun. When the old man spoke, the spiritual energy around Meng Hao seemed to be thrown into chaos, and suddenly he felt as if he were bound in place. Once

again, he experienced the sensation of an invisible hand clawing at his heart. His face flickered, and his heart pounded.

When Liu Daoyun saw the old man, his face fell, and he immediately took a few steps back and raised hands in a salute.

“I am Liu Daoyun of the junior generation. Greetings, Lord Revelation.”

At the same moment that Liu Daoyun made his salute, six figures appeared in the sky. They were quite some distance away, but in the space of a single breath had arrived onto the scene.

When he saw the six people, Meng Hao’s heart sank. They were familiar to him. These were the Core Formation Eccentrics of the State of Zhao who had appeared on the day of the dissolution of the Reliance Sect. One of them was a woman, who had left quite a deep impression on Meng Hao.

Shortly after they arrived, the sky filled with droning streaks of light as over ten people approached. They were not soaring, but actually flying, sending out thunderous roars into the air. The nearby birds and beasts quivered. As the people arrived, their eyes all came to fall on Meng Hao.

His face grew grim as he looked around. He saw the irritable Foundation Establishment Cultivator who had attempted to attack him that day.

A powerful pressure was exerted on everything in the area. Liu Daoyun’s face grew pale and he retreated backward several paces. He glared at Meng Hao; his killing intent was hidden for the moment, but the venom in his face was very clear.

Meng Hao’s heart sank; today there was nowhere to hide. After a moment, his expression returned to normal. He took in a deep breath and looked around at the experts of the State of Zhao. He said nothing.

Chapter 78: No Choice but to Believe!

“Fellow Daoist Revelation truly deserves his reputation of being able to make ingenious divinations,” said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics from the three great Sects. He laughed.

“He arrived here even faster than us.”

“You three Sects didn’t notify me, so I was forced to divine things for myself,” said Lord Revelation in a cool tone.

“Very well,” said one of the Cold Wind Sect Core Formation Eccentrics. He wore a long black robe. “Now that the kid has been found, it won’t be long before we can get into Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone. This matter has been going on for quite a while. Even the great Sects in the Southern Domain are aware of what’s going on.” His gaze had fallen onto Meng Hao, and he looked at him expressionlessly, as if he were cricket.

The lot of them didn’t pay him any heed whatsoever as they spoke, as if they knew that their words could decide his life or death. In fact, their conversation would determine his fate.

Meng Hao said nothing. He knew that if he wanted to fight back against their bullying, he would have to think of a method. His mind spun as he analyzed the situation.

“Patriarch,” said Liu Daoyun, bowing with clasped hands toward one of his Sect’s Core Formation Eccentrics. “This person has a treasured spear hidden on his person.” He lifted his head and looked at Meng Hao with a sneer, the venom written clearly on his face.

“So, the tiny Qi Condensation Cultivator turns out to be of the ninth level....” said the black-robed Cultivator coolly, his face seemingly permanently red. “No wonder he was able to throw the Cultivation World of the State of Zhao into such chaos.” He lifted his hand toward Meng Hao as if he were about to grab him.

“I am here, and so is the spear,” said Meng Hao suddenly, his eyes flashing. His voice could sever nails and slice iron. A wild look appeared in

his eyes that seemed to say he knew he was powerless to prevent them from taking his treasures, but if they did, he would end his own life immediately.

Hearing Meng Hao speak, the old man who had been about to make a move on him stopped and frowned. The onlookers also frowned.

“My Cultivation base is low and weak,” said Meng Hao. “If the older generation wishes to rob my treasures, please do so. But if I lose even one treasure, then I will end my life. And if I am dead, then I can’t take you to Founder Patriarch’s meditation zone. I would rather die than be robbed by you!” As he spoke, his face shone with determination.

“I can just kill you,” said one of the six Core Formation Cultivators, “then use a heaven-defying Spirit Search to drag the location out of you.”

When Meng Hao heard this, he let out a hearty laugh. Not the slightest look of fear could be seen in his eyes. His laughter echoed through the mountains, stabbing into the ears of the old Eccentrics.

“If you plan to Search me then go ahead. Only Inner Sect Disciples know the location of the Patriarch’s meditation zone. But even if you know the location, without me alive, conscious, and unharmed, you’ll never be able to get inside.” When they heard this, all the old Eccentrics stared at him with eyes as cold as ice.

“You of the elder generation have profound Cultivation bases. Surely you know some Spirit Puppetry arts. But without my consciousness there, or if I have been injured in any way, you won’t be able to enter. You must have my complete and utter support!” Decisiveness filled Meng Hao’s voice. He gave them the feeling that he had thrown all caution to the wind, which made them frown.

Actually, when it came to Meng Hao, they didn’t care so much about him; what they truly were interested in was Patriarch Reliance’s Sublime Spirit Scripture. The Eccentrics frowned and then looked toward Lord Revelation.

He stared at Meng Hao, his eyes flashing. Even though he was capable of divining many things, he wasn’t able to divine anything at all about this

particular matter. All eyes were on him as he spoke.

“I can’t divine the details. But even if ninety-five percent of what this kid says is false, we still can’t afford to gamble on it.” His words echoed the thoughts of all the onlookers. These Eccentrics were experienced and astute, as well as crafty. However, all their scheming couldn’t assure victory under these circumstances. This was because... they couldn’t afford to bet. Even if most of what Meng Hao said was a lie, there could be some truth to it.

If they lost, they lost the chance to get into Patriarch Reliance’s Immortal’s Cave. That in turn would mean they lost any chance at the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Anyone, be they at Foundation Establishment or Core Formation, could use Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture to form a second Core Lake within their bodies. They could also repair the Dao pillars they had formed during their Foundation Establishment. If successful, it could make a Cracked Foundation into a Flawless Foundation. To a Core Formation Cultivator, this would also have a big influence on their Core level, which was something they all yearned for.

There were only three great books in the world which contained the secrets methods of how to Cultivate a new Core Lake, even beyond the Qi Condensation stage.

“Very well,” said one of the six, a noble-looking old woman with a hoarse voice. When her words rang out, everyone grew silent. “We are here for the Sublime Spirit Scripture. There’s no need to cause further complications. Child, we won’t steal any of your treasures, nor will we Spirit Search you or turn you into a puppet. But you must assist us, otherwise you are well aware of what the consequences will be. Which is more important, your life? Or the Patriarch’s? As for which decision is best, I’m sure you don’t need our advice on that.”

Meng Hao was silent for a moment, then suddenly said, “Give me one million Spirit Stones! And, I demand the right to kill this person!” His eyes flashed as he pointed at Liu Daoyun.

Liu Daoyun's face grew somber and venom flickered within his eyes. He had just been contemplating various ways to kill Meng Hao. To be suddenly singled out by Meng Hao caused him to reflexively step backwards a few paces.

His heart raced, and cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He knew that these Patriarchs would most likely give in to Meng Hao's every demand to get what they wanted.

"Patriarchs..." said Liu Daoyun, his face pale as he looked up at the two Core Formation Patriarchs from the Cold Wind Sect.

The red-faced old man gave a cold snort. He flicked his sleeve and looked at Meng Hao with cold eyes.

"That will not happen! Tiny Qi Condensation Cultivator, you have an exaggerated opinion of yourself. You dare to make demands of us?!"

"Meng Hao," said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics, an old man in a red robe. "Don't bring up the matter of killing again. And as for the Spirit Stones, we have no way to meet your demand."

"If I get no Spirit Stones, and if this man doesn't die, then I, Meng, will absolutely not agree to take you of the elder generation to the Patriarch's meditation zone. Without my heartfelt consent, you'll never get into his Immortal's Cave." Meng Hao's voice was resolute, and his face emanated an expression that said he was ready to risk everything. He would die without even a frown if he had to.

"Meng Hao..." Liu Daoyun stared at him murderously, his eyes filling up with killing intent.

"Very well," said the dignified old woman in her husky voice. "As for this Cold Wind Sect disciple, your request is denied. Regarding the Spirit Stones, I will take the responsibility for that. I will give you one hundred thousand now, and the rest after we open the Immortal's Cave." If Meng Hao hadn't made any demands, it would have aroused suspicion. She flicked her sleeve, and a bag of holding flew toward Meng Hao. He didn't catch it, but instead moved backward and let the bag fall to the ground.

“Very well,” said Meng Hao slowly. “The killing is off the table. Liu Daoyun, pick up that bag of holding and take the Spirit Stones out of it.”

The woman’s eyes flickered imperceptibly. The other Core Formation Eccentrics also gave him flickering looks.

Liu Daoyun was furious to the extreme. However, Meng Hao’s request was not overly excessive. Even the red-faced old man didn’t say anything, but rather indicated for Liu Daoyun to comply.

Liu Daoyun took a deep breath, pushed down his fury, then walked forward to pick up the bag of holding. He shook the bag, and a massive amount of Spirit Stones poured out onto the ground. They glittered brightly. Liu Daoyun looked at them for a moment, and started to breathe a bit faster.

Meng Hao looked over the Spirit Stones, his expression calm. Then he collected them into his own bag of holding. He had no choice but to exercise caution. These people were not Foundation Establishment Cultivators, but rather of the Core Formation stage. If they wanted to kill him, it would be easier than stepping on a bug.

If it wasn’t for the fact that they couldn’t afford to gamble in this matter, he wouldn’t be able to stand up to them at all, regardless if it were regarding Cultivation base or scheming.

Therefore, Meng Hao did not attempt to pull off some tricky, crafty plot. Instead, he plotted openly. He was betting that even if these people didn’t believe him, they had no choice but to believe.

“You have your Spirit Stones. But this is a weighty matter. Please consume this medicinal pill.” The old woman lifted her right hand, and a black-colored medicinal pill appeared.

When it did, a wind instantly picked up, as if a massive amount of spiritual energy were being gathered up. Slowly, the image of a wicked centipede came to be visible on the surface of the medicinal pill.

Meng Hao’s expression changed. He looked at the pill cautiously.

When Liu Daoyun saw all of this happening, a hideous grin appeared on

his face. The Foundation Establishment Cultivators floating in the air watched on, their faces expressionless, but their eyes sneering at Meng Hao.

As for the Core Formation Eccentrics, none of them batted an eye. If the old woman hadn't produced a pill, they probably would have. Their eyes glittered as they watched.

In terms of scheming, Meng Hao was like a child compared to them. If his plots had truly displeased them, then any ideas he came up with would be useless.

"If you consume the pill, then you can lead the way. If you don't consume it, then we will have to try out our Spirit Searching and Spirit Puppetry arts." The old woman spoke coolly, her expression containing neither happiness nor anger. She flicked her fingers, and the poison pill shot forward to hover in front of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment in thought. He wasn't sure whether or not the pill really was poisonous. Perhaps it was something else even more nefarious. But he didn't seem to have any other choice. He clenched his jaw, then reached out and grabbed the pill.

"Speaking of poison pills, I have one as well," said the red-faced old man with a laugh. He flicked his wide sleeve, and a reddish pill appeared in his hand. It flew to Meng Hao.

"Actually, our Sect happens to have one as well." It turned out the Core Formation Cultivators from the three great Sects all had poison pills. The pills transformed into beams of light as they flew toward Meng Hao.

The old woman's face was calm, and it was impossible to tell what she was thinking. She looked around coolly at her fellow Eccentrics, saying nothing. They were all circumspect and far-seeing. If Meng Hao swallowed one poison pill, he might as well swallow more. This way, he wouldn't just be under the control of the old woman. This was the most fair method.

"Seeing the Fellow Daoist's actions, I must humbly act to save my own face." Lord Revelation smiled and waved his right hand. A three-colored medicinal pill appeared and raced toward Meng Hao.

Compared to the other medicinal pills, this pill appeared extraordinary. Meng Hao wasn't sure why, but when his gaze fell onto this pill, his entire body felt jittery.

Chapter 79: Kill!

“Four poison pills,” said Meng Hao, his voice grim and his expression unsightly. “I of the younger generation am worried that if I consume this pill, I won’t be able to lead you forward. If the poison takes effect, I will die. If it doesn’t take effect, then how will the elder generation ensure that I can dispel the poison later? Or have you not even considered that?!”

“Of course there is a poison dispelling technique,” said the red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect, his face expressionless. “Whether or not you chose to believe is up to you.” In this, he used Meng Hao’s own tactic against him. The complete resolution of all the various matters now rested on Meng Hao.

He stood silently for a moment. As the man had said, the choice to believe lay in him alone. Unfortunately, if he chose not to believe, then the current situation would never be resolved.

Meng Hao’s eyes glanced over the four pills. Three of them he recognized. “This is... a Centipede Dragon Pill. This one is a Frigid Corpse Pill and this is a Blood Withering Pill. As for this one....” The three-colored pill from Lord Revelation was something he had never heard of before. There had been no information about it in the ancient jade slip.

“Patriarch Reliance’s Cultivation base is as high as the Heavens,” Meng Hao muttered to himself. “He should be able to figure it out.” He clenched his jaw, then lifted his hands and put one of the pills into his mouth. It appeared to contain something alive within it, and sure enough, Meng Hao felt a searing pain as it slid down his throat. And yet, the pain didn’t cause him to hesitate. His eyes bloodshot, he forced down all of the pills. As he swallowed the pill given to him by Lord Revelation, he looked the man in the eyes.

Lord Revelation smiled the entire time. Meng Hao didn’t hesitate at all. He knew that he had to swallow the pills to allay everyone’s suspicions.

The instant Lord Revelation’s pill entered his mouth, it dissolved into a Qi which seeped into his flesh and blood. Seeing Meng Hao swallow the

four pills in succession left Liu Daoyun feeling quite pleased.

The ten or more Foundation Establishment Cultivators watched Meng Hao with strange expressions in their eyes. Seeing his resoluteness left them feeling the need to be more vigilant.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His expression grim, he looked up at the Eccentrics. He said nothing.

“Let’s go,” said the old woman with a nod. She waved a finger toward Meng Hao, then turned into a prismatic rainbow and shot away. The other Cultivators present followed, one by one. Her wave of a finger caused the bag of holding that lay on the ground at Meng Hao’s feet to suddenly transform into a hideous mist spirit. Its body flickered as it wrapped around Meng Hao and then shot into the sky.

Liu Daoyun followed along, looking at Meng Hao with a cold smile.

“You’re dead!” he said grimly.

Meng Hao didn’t reply. He just looked coldly at Liu Daoyun’s twisted face.

“After you take the Patriarchs into the Immortal’s cave, just wait until you come back out. You’re dead for sure. Even if you dispel the poison, I won’t let you go. There’s nowhere you can run to in the State of Zhao. By the way, you’re a Reliance Inner Sect disciple, yet you have no choice but to lead people to kill your own Sect’s Patriarch. How does that feel? Liu Daoyun’s malicious words were filled with ridicule.

“You killed Sun Hua over a silver spear. How does that feel?” said Meng Hao coolly, looking down at Liu Daoyun below him. The earth sped past beneath him. This was a speed Meng Hao had never achieved before.

As far as Liu Daoyun went, Meng Hao didn’t care about him at all. But Meng Hao’s words hit him like a stick jabbed into a fresh wound. His eyes were red through and through, and he looked at Meng Hao with a matchless hatred; he wished to rip him into pieces. The incident with Sun Hua was the most humiliating thing that had ever happened in his life. In fact, it had ruined any future prospects within his Sect. He had basically

been cast aside. Right now, his eyes seemed as if they would shoot flames. He clenched his fists tightly as he glared murderously at Meng Hao.

Seeing Meng Hao's lack of expression arose a hard-to-describe feeling that threatened to drive him mad. He punched the air with his fist.

Panting, he gritted his teeth for a long moment before saying, "You swallowed four poison pills. I'll just wait until the poison takes effect. Your body will rot and your heart will be torn apart."

"Today, you will die beneath my sword," said Meng Hao coolly, sounding neither happy nor angry. He looked down at the barren mountains whizzing by beneath him, and then at the four mountain peaks of the Reliance Sect off in the distance.

"You sure can talk big," said Liu Daoyun with a cold laugh and a sinister expression. It seemed he didn't take Meng Hao's words seriously at all. "You'll do that all by yourself? I can't wait to see the poison kick in!"

After he finished speaking, a booming sound rang out. The group of people had arrived at the Reliance Sect main square. It was deserted, occupied only by fallen leaves, bird droppings and a few animals which scattered in fright.

A fierce wind accompanied the group's arrival, sweeping clean the Outer Sect square. Seeing the place, Meng Hao's face flickered with a variety of expressions.

"What does it feel like to see your Sect become like this, Meng Hao?" said Liu Daoyun with a sneer. As he spoke, Meng Hao turned and looked at him, killing intent springing from his eyes. He had already begun moving. He lifted his hand, and fifty flying swords appeared, flying straight toward Liu Daoyun.

"I think this place is the perfect location to bury you in."

There had been no indication whatsoever that Meng Hao would attack. Even as his words echoed out, the swords were upon Liu Daoyun. His expression changed; he had never imagined that Meng Hao would dare to attack him in the presence of all the Patriarchs.

He shot backward quickly, biting down on his tongue and spitting out some blood, along with a pearl. This pearl was different than the treasures he had used before. As soon as it flew out of his mouth, it began to radiate an intense killing aura. It transformed into a hideous, black demonic face, which then slammed into Meng Hao's fifty flying swords.

An explosion reverberated out as the demonic face blocked most of the flying swords. However, one flying sword pierced through and continued on toward Liu Daoyun.

Liu Daoyun's face twisted; he knew that he was in a dangerous life-or-death situation, a critical juncture. He let out a howl, throwing up his arm to defend against the sword. The sword stabbed through his right shoulder, sending blood spraying about. A horrified shriek rang out throughout the deserted Reliance Sect.

Even as the sword stabbed into his shoulder, it suddenly exploded, causing Liu Daoyun's right arm to disappear into a cloud of blood. Blood also sprayed from his mouth, and he retreated backward, face pale and eyes shining with fear and astonishment.

Everything happened too quickly, in the space of time it takes for a spark to fly up. His right arm was destroyed, and his horrified screams still echoed through the air. The Eccentrics from the three great Sects looked back one by one, their eyes cold. This was especially so of the people from the Cold Wind Sect.

Liu Daoyun retreated, shrieking and howling.

"Patriarchs, this guy...."

His expression cold, Meng Hao stepped forward. Even as Liu Daoyun was in the middle of speaking, Meng Hao waved his right hand, and one hundred flying swords appeared, covering the entire square in a massive Sword Rain. It descended upon Liu Daoyun. Liu Daoyun might have been at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, but so was Meng Hao. Furthermore, Meng Hao's Cultivation was based on the Sublime Spirit Scripture, and he had a golden Core Sea. He even has a sliver of Spiritual Sense in his mind. This was more than enough to crush Liu Daoyun. The Sword Rain

whistled through the air. Liu Daoyun had no more time for speaking.

There was a boom, and Liu Daoyun spit up more blood. A glittering light shone in front of him as his crystalline sword defied the might of Meng Hao's one hundred flying swords. And yet, this in itself caused more injury to Liu Daoyun, who retreated further, howling.

"Patriarchs, save me!"

"Meng Hao, hold your hand!" came a voice from among the four Formation Establishment experts from the Cold Wind Sect. They frowned, obviously unwilling to allow Meng Hao to slay Liu Daoyun in front of all these people. Their bodies turned into beams of light as they sped forward.

"This is between me and him," said Meng Hao, not even looking at the four Foundation Establishment experts. "Even if the poison takes effect on me right now, I will kill this man!" His expression was filled with murder and resolve.

The person he wanted to kill was Liu Daoyun of the Cold Wind Sect. But there were others present from the three great Sects other than the Cold Wind Sect. They, of course, would not stand by idly and watch Meng Hao be poisoned to death before opening the Immortal's Cave. They would not allow small matters from other Sects to interfere with their interests.

The others flew forward, blocking the path of the Cold Wind Sect Foundation Establishment experts.

"Fellow Daoist Zhang, there's no need to pay attention to the trifling matters of Qi Condensation Cultivators. Come, come, we haven't seen each other for years. Why don't we chat a bit about the old days?"

"Correct. Brother Chen, we haven't seen each other for three years. I have a few questions about Cultivation that I was hoping to discuss with you." The four Cold Wind Sect Foundation Establishment Cultivator's faces grew livid when they heard all of these words. They were about to speak when suddenly Liu Daoyun let out another horrified scream.

Meng Hao's fingers flickered in incantation patterns, and two hundred flying swords filled the sky. They descended upon Liu Daoyun with ear-

piercing whistling sounds. Meng Hao took another step forward, and flashed an incantation pattern. A Flame Python emerged, dozens of meters long. Its roars reverberated out across the square. Blood sprayed from Liu Daoyun's mouth as his crystalline sword shattered into pieces. He retreated backward constantly, desperation filling his eyes.

On the other hand, Meng Hao's eyes shone with killing intent and determination. He flew forward, and a sword appeared in his right hand. It was the wooden sword, and it sped toward Liu Daoyun with unstoppable force.

"Get out of my way!" The faces of the four Foundation Establishment experts changed. They howled and attempted to force their way through to block Meng Hao.

"This man tried to kill me many times. This is a personal grudge. If anyone gets in my way, I'll kill myself before opening the Patriarch's Immortal's Cave!" As his voice rang out, he completely ignored the four Foundation Establishment experts. Without a shred of hesitation, he shot toward Liu Daoyun, the wooden sword outstretched, clearly intending to slay him.

"Patriarchs, save me!!" screamed Liu Daoyun shrilly. It seemed the Foundation Establishment experts were about to attack, when a dry cough could be heard. It came from the old woman. Shock filled the hearts of the four experts, and they instantly stood stock still, their faces pale. The dry cough had slammed into their hearts like a lightning bolt from the Heavens, sending their minds spinning.

"This is too much!" said the red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect. He snorted, and a cold look appeared in his eye, which shot out toward Meng Hao. Even as this happen, Lord Revelation let out a hearty laugh. He flicked his sleeve; the cold look that had been shooting toward Meng Hao instantly fell apart.

"You!" said the red-faced old man, his eyes filled with rage.

Chapter 80: Meng Hao's Scheming

"Fellow Daoist, there's no need to lose your temper," said Lord Revelation, smiling. "As far as these trifling issues amongst the junior generation, why don't we just watch on?"

As these words were exchanged between the two of them, Liu Daoyun let out another miserable cry. Meng Hao stepped forward, and with the slice of a sword, sent Liu Daoyun's left arm flying off from his body. Blood sprayed everywhere. More flying swords flew out from Meng Hao's bag of holding. One after another, they stabbed into his opponent. Blood spread out everywhere. In the space of an instant, Liu Daoyun's body was penetrated by a dozen swords.

Leaning up toward him, Meng Hao quietly said, "If I say that you will die this day, then die you shall."

Despair filled Liu Daoyun's wide eyes. Blood seeped out of his mouth.

The four Foundation Establishment Cultivators watched in shock as the scene unfolded. They were especially astounded by Meng Hao's vicious expression.

"Enough!" said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics from the Cold Wind Sect, his face extremely unsightly. He waved his finger, and suddenly the spiritual energy in the area seemed to churn into motion and race toward Meng Hao. It wrapped around his body, leaving his own spiritual energy untouched, but pulling him away from Liu Daoyun.

As Meng Hao drifted away from him, hope gleamed within Liu Daoyun's eyes, despite his severe wounds.

"Boom!" said Meng Hao coolly, the killing intent in his eyes flashing.

At the same time as the word left his mouth, the dozen flying swords impaled in Liu Daoyun's body suddenly detonated. A blood-curdling scream echoed out in all directions. Liu Daoyun's body was torn to pieces. Not even his head was left intact as chunks of flesh flew out in all directions.

As for the four Foundation Establishment Cultivators, the pupils of their eyes shrank to dots. They stared at the gore, and then at Meng Hao, whose face was expressionless. They would never forget this moment for the rest of their lives.

Especially memorable was the speed with which Meng Hao attacked, and the decisiveness in his voice. It revealed that his way of thinking was anything but ordinary. He had turned everyone who was not a member of the Cold Wind Sect into his assistants. The grisly result revealed how stubborn he truly was.

Anyone else might be able to think of such a plan, but few people would have the gall to pull it off. As of this day, they had witnessed Meng Hao's first true kill!

"He's dead, you can release me now," said Meng Hao, his voice indifferent.

The Core Formation Eccentrics floated in the air, staring down at Meng Hao. His resoluteness to kill left a deep impression in their hearts.

Even Lord Revelation took a long look at him. Everything that had happened just now gave him a glimpse of the cruelty Meng Hao was capable of.

The Core Formation Patriarch from the Cold Wind Sect who currently held Meng Hao bound had a grim look on his face. Meng Hao had killed Liu Daoyun right in front of him, even after he had intervened. He had lost face because of this. With a mere thought, he could rip Meng Hao to pieces in much the same fashion as Liu Daoyun had died. But considering the expressions on the faces of the surrounding Cultivators, that was not an option.

With a cold snort, he flicked his sleeve, and the invisible bonds around Meng Hao disappeared. But he still hit Meng Hao with an invisible attack, causing him to spit out a mouthful of blood. Meng Hao looked at him, his face pale, but his eyes shining with a dark look.

"Liu Daoyun constantly ridiculed me and swore to kill me," said Meng Hao, looking at the Core Formation Eccentric who had injured him just

now. “I of the junior generation had no choice but to attack first. I request that you members of the senior generation preside over manners in an impartial manner. At the moment, I am somewhat worried that the Cold Wind Sect will withhold their antidote pill. Could you please produce the pill so that I of the junior generation can rest at ease when I open Patriarch Reliance’s Immortal’s cave?”

The eyes of the four Foundation Establishment Cultivators flashed as they suddenly seemed to comprehend how cruel and treacherous Meng Hao was.

The Core Formation Eccentrics had been around a long time, and their eyes flickered upon hearing Meng Hao’s words. They instantly understood what he was thinking, and they frowned as they looked toward the two Cold Wind Sect Core Formation experts.

Their faces were as cold as ice.

“With a scheming heart like yours, you will find it hard to stay behind in the State of Zhao,” said Lord Revelation. “I have an opening for a servant, Meng Hao. You should consider it.” His eyes twinkled as he looked at Meng Hao. His smile seemed as grim and mysterious as the decoration on his long robe, a solitary eye set in the middle of a mystical square.

The red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect harrumphed. The three great Sects didn’t usually get along, and at the moment, he was well aware that the surrounding Cultivators were gazing at him with flashing eyes. He didn’t want to cause further complications, but in his heart, he had marked Meng Hao for death. He waved his right hand, and a white-colored medicinal appeared and shot toward Meng Hao.

It emitted a fragrant aroma. From his study of the ancient jade slip, Meng Hao could tell at a glance that this was the antidote for the Frigid Corpse Pill.

He grabbed it. He didn’t eat it, though, but put it into his bag of holding. Then he took a breath and headed toward the peak of the East Mountain.

As for the experts from the three Great Sects, they watched him closely, ready to make a move in an instant if he tried to do anything out of the

ordinary. Lord Revelation floated next to them, eyes glittering as he gazed at the East Mountain.

Meng Hao didn't soar directly up to the top of the peak. The Eccentrics would just have to be patient. Meng Hao walked the path up to the East Mountain, passing Wang Tengfei's Immortal's Cave. He also caught sight of Elder Brother Chen's and Elder Sister Xu's caves. Images from the past coalesced in his mind, and he let out a sigh.

Finally, he stopped in front of the Immortal's Cave that had belonged to him. He looked at it quietly, then moved on, eventually reaching the peak of the East Mountain, and the Reliance Sect's main temple hall.

The setting sun shone onto the hall, making it look very dignified. Taking broad steps, Meng Hao strode inside. His gaze swept over the statues inside, coming to rest on the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

The day that Patriarch Reliance had frightened off the Cultivators from the other Sects, he had told Meng Hao of the secret method to open the way to his Immortal's Cave. Now, over a year later, Meng Hao had finally returned.

The appointed year had already passed, actually. As Meng Hao approached the statue of Patriarch Reliance, the experts from the State of Zhao watched him from behind.

He took a deep breath, then lifted his right hand and pushed his finger against a spot on the statue. Every few seconds, he would push his finger against the same spot. Again and again he pushed, until he had pushed it one hundred seventy-nine times. Suddenly, the temple hall began to shudder. The statues shook violently, then shattered, causing the entire hall to collapse into pieces. Then, a brilliant light shined out from the statue of Patriarch Reliance, sweeping away all the debris and rubble, leaving only the statue itself.

Underneath the statue was a stone platform. When the surrounding Cultivators caught sight of this, their eyes shone with anticipation.

The statue radiated an incredible power, and its eyes shone as if they were alive. This caused the Cultivators to be even more excited, although

none of them dared to approach the statue.

Meng Hao took a few steps back, then cupped his hands and bowed deeply. “Disciple Meng Hao wishes to disturb the Patriarch’s slumber. Patriarch, can you please open the door to your Immortal’s Cave?” He lifted his head, and his eyes glittered. His back to the State of Zhao experts, his lips moved as he murmured some complicated sounds.

“Converge!”

The instant the word left his mouth, the statue began to vibrate, and an even more brilliant light shone from its eyes. The light grew intensely bright, and a fierce wind kicked up. Looks of astonishment covered the faces of the State of Zhao experts.

Cracks appeared on the surface of the statue, more and more. Within the space of a few breaths, it exploded with a bang, sending pieces flying around in all directions. Now, the stone platform which the statue had stood on began to issue a blinding light.

The blinding light issued by the rotating spell caused the State of Zhao experts to breath heavily. Anyone familiar with spells like this could tell that it was a sealing spell which was being unbound.

A thunderous roar echoed out, and a wide beam of light shot up into the sky. Then the beam began to twist around until it formed a giant ring.

The inside of the ring grew blurry, and then transformed into a vortex, a passageway to another location.

As soon as the ring of light formed, Meng Hao leaped into the air and shot forward. He disappeared into the ring. Behind him, the experts from the State of Zhao hesitated, their faces twisting.

“Foundation Establishment disciples, you go first,” said Lord Revelation. The six Core Formation Cultivators nodded their agreement, and the dozen or so Foundation Establishment Cultivators gritted their teeth and flew forward. They disappeared into the vortex.

After the space of ten or so breaths, Lord Revelation and the Core Formation Eccentrics exchanged glances. One member from each of the

three great Sects went next. After they entered, the remaining Eccentrics as well as Lord Revelation followed.

Upon entering the vortex, their minds spun, and they began to breathe hard. Looking around, the first thing they caught sight of was an enormous stone stele. Golden characters were inscribed onto the stele. The characters at the very top instantly sent their eyes shining.

“Sublime Spirit Scripture!!”

Chapter 81: The Patriarch's Immortal's Cave

In Patriarch Reliance's meditation zone, all of the Cultivators from the State of Zhao were staring at the stone stele which had been left behind by Chen Fan. With great enthusiasm, they copied the text onto jade slips.

"This stone stele is the Sublime Spirit Scripture!"

"I never imagined it would be so simple to get! Haha! Even though I've already established my Foundation, with this scripture, I can form a second Core Sea. With this Qi Condensation manual, I can raise the Dao pillars of my Foundation from Fractured to Cracked. It might even be possible to form a Flawless Foundation!"

Lord Revelation approached, followed by the dignified old woman. "No," she said, "only half of the scripture is here..." She could tell the truth of it from a single glance.

Lord Revelation continued forward a few steps, his eyes shining with a strange light.

Suddenly, the stele, as if it couldn't withstand being the subject of so many gazes, began to fracture. Popping sounds could be heard as cracks spread out across it. Everyone watched on in shock.

As the cracks spread, the golden characters faded, to be replaced by another set of characters, these ones dim and barely readable. These characters were the second half of the Qi Condensation manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

Before everyone could finish reading the text, a boom rang out and the stone stele exploded, fragmenting into eight pieces.

Eight multicolored beams of light could be seen as the pieces flew off in various directions.

The onlookers were shocked, but immediately scattered about. The seven Core Formation Eccentrics each shot after one of the pieces, as did

Lord Revelation. The eighth piece was left to the ten or so Foundation Establishment experts to deal with.

Within an instant, everything was thrown into chaos. Upon scattering, the newcomers discovered that Patriarch Reliance's meditation zone was filled with magical items, spirit stones and medicinal pills. This of course caused quite a sensation among them. Unfortunately, all of the items were protected with restrictive spells. Unless they could force the spells open, the items were untouchable.

Suddenly, roaring sounds erupted within the meditation zone. Within the gray light appeared multiple figures. With crazed appearances, they charged toward the intruders.

As for Meng Hao, as soon as the chaos broke out, he pulled out a Vorpall Jade Blood Crystal and stepped off to the side. He had used quite a few Blood Crystals the last time he was here, but in the end had two left over, which he'd stuffed into his bag of holding. After pulling one of them out, the crazed automatons which had suddenly appeared refused to approach him.

"I've brought everyone here. Now let's see how Patriarch Reliance deals with them." Meng Hao's eyes glittered coldly. He didn't have any good feelings whatsoever about these people. He watched as they went chasing after the fragments of the stone stele, a cold smile on his face. He couldn't wait to see them dead.

Of course, the stone stele was a fake. He'd known that the instant it had appeared, a year ago. Exercising caution, he slowly walked forward, avoiding the other Cultivators. He wasn't sure of the exact location where Patriarch Reliance sat in secluded meditation. But he knew that he couldn't leave this place until the Patriarch helped him dispel the poison from his body.

Also, there was the reward that the Patriarch had spoken of.

Shortly afterwards, Meng Hao stopped and looked around. Booms filled the air and explosions shook the ground. Off in the distance, he could see the dignified old woman, her hair flying about in disarray as she used one

magical art after another to batter a glowing shield in front of her.

Within the glow of the shield was one of the stone stele fragments.

The old woman was of the Core Formation stage. Her attacks caused everything around her to shake wildly. Her magical arts shot out one after another like a silver river, sending out bone-piercing Frigid Qi, which caused everything around her to freeze into pieces of ice. Within the river, there could be heard what sounded like the shrieks of countless wailing souls from the netherworld. It was as if the river itself had sprung from the nine hells.

She flicked her sleeve, and the murky image of a mountain appeared, bearing down toward the glowing shield. The mountain, which seemed to be composed of stars, solidified into a burning point, which then became black. Despite being black in color, it radiated a bright light.

In a spectacular display, the river and mountain began to interlock with each other.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. The silver strands which surrounded the old woman made it seem as if she had the power to destroy heaven and earth. She could definitely slay him as easily as stepping on an ant. There wouldn't even be a need for her to use the river from hell or mountain made from stars.

"So this is Core Formation...." Meng Hao watched closely, at the same time moving a bit further away. He didn't dare to get any closer.

The woman let out a howl, and an explosion reverberated out. Despite being some distance away, Meng Hao's body was shaken, and he spit up some blood. He moved back further, watching as the woman spit out a round pill from her mouth. The pill was composed of three intertwined colors. As soon as it appeared, Meng Hao felt a sensation as if everything in the world was about to crumble to pieces. In his eyes, this multicolored pill was the beginning and end of everything.

Shining brightly, the pill shot toward the shield, whereupon a massive explosion rang out. Meng Hao continued to retreat backward, his face pale.

“A Core Formation Cultivator could wipe me from existence in the blink of an eye!” As he moved backwards, he thought back to the Dao Protector Wang Xifan from the Wang Clan.

“I’m at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. But even if I could get to the tenth... I would be so weak I couldn’t stand up to a single bit of battle magic from a Core Formation Cultivator!” He stared at the proceedings, continuing to retreat.

“All these people are over one hundred years of age each. In terms of wisdom and experience, I can’t match up to them.... It’s a good thing my schemes just now all worked, otherwise....” When he thought about this, his heart twitched with fear.

“After the Core Formation stage is the Nascent Soul stage. I wonder how truly powerful a Nascent Soul Cultivator is....” When he thought of this, his heart began to thump, and he thought about Eccentric Song, whom he still had never met.

“What is the level of Patriarch Reliance’s Cultivation base again? I remember the Sect Leader talked about it before. He’s at the Spirit Severing stage... That’s even beyond the Nascent Soul stage!” Meng Hao began to pant, and a look of envy appeared in his eyes. Stubbornness filled his heart. He desired to be powerful. He knew that only by being powerful could he avoid being an insect that others could trample upon and crush. Only by being powerful could he achieve his desires and fulfil his dreams.

On a more practical level, only by being powerful would he be able to survive in the Cultivation world!

Meng Hao watched in awe as the power of a Core Formation Cultivator was unleashed. Massive explosions filled Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zones. The explosions did not sound out from one location, but from seven. The entire area filled with thunderous roars, and the various protective spells appeared to be rippling.

The explosions caused by the seven Core Formation Eccentrics seemed as if they would cause the entire place to collapse.

“The Patriarch just said to bring the State of Zhao experts here. He never

said what to do after that....” Meng Hao hesitated, and he considered making an escape. But then, a massive roaring sound could be heard, and far off in the distance a beam of light shot up.

From this distance it didn’t look very thick. However, Meng Hao could tell that it must be approximately ten meters in diameter. It filled the sky of the Immortal’s Cave with its power.

A laugh echoed out from the same direction as the beam of light, and Meng Hao recognized Lord Revelation’s voice. He had obviously broken the shield and acquired one of the fragments of the stone stele.

Just then, another boom rang out, and another beam of light ascended up. This beam shot up from the direction of the dignified old woman. Her hair flew about wildly as the shield shattered. She stepped forward and took the stone stele fragment.

Meanwhile, within the secluded meditation zone, Patriarch Reliance’s eyes shined and he breathed rapidly. His body was gaunt and wizened, and he stared fixedly at seven oil lamps which were spread out in front of him. At first glance, they seemed to be scattered about randomly, but upon closer inspection it was clear that they had been organized in a mystical pattern.

Just now, two of the lamps had been extinguished. The other five flickered weakly.

“The kid was a few months late. I was starting to get more and more nervous. But in the end, he brought the people here!” Excitement filled his eyes as he looked at the oil lamps.

“Extinguish, dammit! These people are so weak. After all this time, they’ve only managed to extinguish two sealing lamps. I’m expending power from my own Cultivation base to weaken them so that the Core Formation level people can handle them. But they still haven’t succeeded. Dammit! Without my training these State of Zhao brats don’t know how to practice Cultivation. Back in the day, I would go beat them up every once in a while. Those people had much better Cultivation bases.” Thinking back to the old days, Patriarch Reliance let out a sigh. His desire

to break out of the secluded meditation zone was even stronger than before.

“After I absorb these peoples’ Cultivation bases and scour their memories, I should be able to achieve enlightenment and succeed in my second severing. Then I can carry out my master plan! Dammit! For every severing, I need to achieve Dao enlightenment. Upon success, the severing can proceed. But afterwards, I will be incredibly weak. Without a bit of luck to help me recover, the severing can lead to death, and becoming one with the Dao.” Patriarch Reliance ground his teeth. But as he thought of his master plan, a look of hope gleamed in his eyes. It was a look that had existed there for many, many years.

About this time, an explosion thundered out, and another of the lamps in front of him went out. The look of anticipation in his eyes grew stronger.

As for Meng Hao, he stood outside in the meditation zone, trembling with fear. He wasn’t walking around any more. Instead, he had concealed himself in a distant corner, a look of vigilance on his face.

He was waiting for Patriarch Reliance to appear, put an end to these people, then dispel the poison in his body and give him his reward.

A short time later, another thunderous roar could be heard. Lord Revelation and the dignified old woman had joined the others in their struggles. The remaining shields soon broke. The third, fourth, and fifth shields broke.... In the time it takes an incense stick to burn, thunderous explosions rang out constantly. Soon, seven pillars of light shot up into the air.

Finally, the seven Core Formation Cultivators transformed into beams of light as they converged on the final shield, which was currently surrounded by the Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

They combined their powers, and within the space of about ten breaths, a boom shook everything, and an eighth pillar of light climbed upwards. The whole Immortal’s Cave seemed on the verge of collapse.

At this exact moment, amidst the roaring and shaking, massive cracks

appeared in the ground. The roaring grew even more intense. The ground seemed to ripple, as if it were going to collapse into nothing.

The experts from the State of Zhao looked shocked at this sudden event. They flew up into the air and looked down at the collapsing earth. Within a moment, the shaking ceased. It was then that they noticed that all of the rubble and cracks had formed into... a massive face!

The face belonged to none other than Patriarch Reliance!

If you forgot about the circumstances in which Chen Fan left behind the stele, then check out Chapter 40

If you forgot about what happened between Wang Xifan and Meng Hao, then check out chapter 35

Chapter 82: The Great Art of Demonic Life

Between the eyebrows of the giant face appeared seven ancient-looking oil lamps, all of them extinguished. A massive and ancient Qi emanated out in all directions. The exquisite Qi seemed to contain the essence of heaven and earth.

When the giant face appeared, the State of Zhao Cultivators all looked shocked, and some of them made to flee.

“Don’t panic,” said Lord Revelation, his voice booming out. “I knew from the beginning that Patriarch Reliance wasn’t dead. He’s incredibly weak, and we are of the Core Formation stage. If we join hands, we can easily wipe him out.” Everyone from the State of Zhao stopped moving.

A laugh rang out from the giant face, hoarse and potent. Filled with crazed excitement, it pierced the ears and hearts of everyone present.

As the laughter echoed out, the faces of the floating Cultivators changed. Without saying a word, the dignified old woman turned and shot toward the exit, panting.

Even as she attempted to fly away, a massive, indistinct hand popped into being next to her and wrapped itself around her body. A boom rang out, along with a blood-curdling shriek, as the hand crushed her to death. Everything shook. Meng Hao looked on in shock.

The giant hand opened, and inside could be seen a three-colored mixed Core. The hand made a flicking motion, and the Core shot toward the first of the seven lamps below on the ground. The lamp was now alight, burning the Core as fuel and emanating flames composed of life force!

Flickering firelight emanated out, filling the darkness with light.

“We cannot flee!” barked Lord Revelation, his face growing pale. “Kill what is left of Patriarch Reliance, and our spoils of victory will be immense!” The other Cultivators had looks of astonishment on their faces after watching the miserable fate of the old woman. They clenched their

jaws.

Suddenly, a booming sound could be heard. The area around the mouth of the giant face suddenly collapsed, and a black, shadowy figure emerged.

Laughter accompanied the figure, echoing out in the Immortal's Cave.

"Patriarch Reliance!" The echo of the laughter thundered out, and the Immortal's Cave shook. The shocked Cultivators coughed up blood.

Amidst the blackness, Patriarch Reliance could be seen. His body was gaunt, almost nothing but skin and bones, as if he had just climbed up from the grave. His eyes were dim and dark, yet seemed to be filled with ferocity and power.

Up above them, clouds roiled, and around Patriarch Reliance's body, ripples began to emanate out. It seemed as if he were standing on top of the world. His power, arrogance, and thirst for blood struck fear into the hearts of the other Cultivators.

"Patriarch Reliance...." The red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect suddenly looked pale, and his body trembled. He was a Core Formation Cultivator, but facing Patriarch Reliance, he was as powerless as a cricket. The only reason he had dared to come to this place for the Sublime Spirit Scripture was because Lord Revelation had divined that the Patriarch was weak to the point of death. At the moment, however, Patriarch Reliance seemed anything but weak.

"Revelation, things aren't settled between us!" he said, spinning and rushing toward the exit. The others with him moved to follow, one by one. Their bodies transformed into prismatic beams as they shot away.

Meng Hao stood down below staring up at them, his fists clenched.

Patriarch Reliance laughed, and it was filled with both excitement and bloodlust. His body flickered, and suddenly he was floating in mid-air. He moved his hand in a downward motion, and a booming sound filled the air. A massive pressure pushed downwards, and the red-faced old man and his followers spat up blood. They fell down to the ground, their bodies no longer under their own control.

Patriarch Reliance's body flickered again, and then he was standing in front of the red-faced old man. The old man's pupils shrank in astonishment as Patriarch Reliance's body suddenly fused with his own.

A blood-curdling scream sounded out, causing the scalps of the onlookers to go numb.

The red-faced old man's body began to wither. His hair fell out as his flesh and blood dried up. A blackness appeared that seemed capable of consuming all blood and life. In the blink of an eye, it had completely swallowed him up.

His skin grew as thin as paper, and his bones began to crumble. Soon, his entire person had turned into a mist of blood, which then coalesced into another figure; Patriarch Reliance. Except now, he was not as gaunt as he had been moments ago. His figure was more fleshed out, and a slight Death Qi radiated out from him. It seemed as if some of his life force had been restored. In his hand, he held the red-faced old man's three-colored mixed Core. He flicked his sleeve, and it shot into the second oil lamp.

"The Great Art of Demonic Life!"

"It's the legendary Great Art of Demonic Life! Unending life! The Great Art of Demonic Life which can borrow bodies and spirits!" A buzz of voices sounded out. When the remaining Core Foundation Cultivators and the trembling Foundation Establishment Cultivators watched the scene unfold, looks of despair appeared on their faces.

"This is a Demonic magic from the Demon Sealing Sect, before the Sect's name changed!" A strange look flashed through Lord Revelation's eyes.

Meng Hao watched in astonishment. This was the second time he had heard of the Demon Sealing Sect. The first time had been from the lips of Shangguan Xiu. At the time, Meng Hao hadn't paid it much heed. How could he believe what Shangguan Xiu had said? If Meng Hao truly was connected to such prestigious name, how could he have so many enemies in the State of Zhao?

At that time, Meng Hao had committed the name to memory, with the intention of getting further corroboration later.

Now, having seen the shocking events of moments ago, he'd heard the name again. Currently, the three words "Demon Sealing Sect" seemed to float in his head.

He thought back to the rumors he'd heard when in the Sect. It was said that a thousand years ago, the Reliance Sect had gone by a different name. However, no one had ever spoken the original name. Now that he thought about it, it seemed as if the name were taboo within the Sect.

He thought of the Demonic beasts in the black mountain outside of the Sect. Then he thought of the North Sea, and grew even more confused. When he had encountered the North Sea for the first time, why had it helped him?

Even though he didn't completely understand everything, at least now he was gaining a bit more understanding.

"Demon Sealing Sect..." Meng Hao took a deep breath, thinking to the Demonic magic that Shangguan Xiu had used, and the fearsome power that had erupted out of Mount Daqing.

"If Shangguan Xiu reached Foundation Establishment, the power of his Demonic magic would have been extremely potent..." Meng Hao's heart began to race as he realized that as a member of the Reliance Inner Sect, he was also... an Inner Sect disciple of the ancient Demon Sealing Sect!

A new question appeared in Meng Hao's mind. "Why did Patriarch Reliance change the name of the Sect?"

As Meng Hao considered these things, the slaughter above him continued. Patriarch Reliance's body had transformed into a fiery mist that filled the air. From the cries that rang out, it was clear that the Foundation Establishment Cultivators were completely incapable of escape. One by one, their bodies spasmed and began to dry up. Their life force was sucked out of them until they turned into nothing more than bones, which in turn were crumbled into dust. Every thread of life force shot toward Patriarch Reliance.

The remaining five Core Formation Cultivators couldn't flee either. Under the command of Lord Revelation, they produced various magical

items and prepared magical techniques, launching them toward Patriarch Reliance in a last ditch effort to defeat him.

The four Foundation Establishment Cultivators from the Cold Wind Sect had died miserably, their bodies reduced to little more than dust. Their counterparts from the Winding Stream Sect and the Upright Evening Sect suffered the same fate. These were people who could shake the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao by simply stamping a foot. Yet here, they were as weak as children.

A partially intact head rolled to a stop in front of Meng Hao's feet. His face grew pale. The bloody slaughter was causing his heart to tremble. Looking down at the head, he recognized the face as that of the Foundation Establishment expert who had attempted to kill him a year ago in the Reliance Sect. White Qi emanated from the head. Within moments, the head dissolved into blood, which soaked into the ground.

Just then, a horrified scream rang out from one of the Winding Stream Sect's Core Formation Eccentrics. His body began to rot. He continued to scream as he dried up. Even before he was dead, a third three-colored mixed Core flew out to land in the third lamp, which then began to burn brightly.

As of now, Patriarch Reliance's body was no longer gaunt and shriveled. Instead, he was a middle-aged man.

His long hair swept about his tall frame. A dignified air emanated out from him, making him seem powerful to the extreme. And yet, buried deep within that power, was a Demonic aura.

However, there were still areas on his chest that were still withered, as well as some parts of his face and the rest of his body. There, the flesh seemed to twitch and writhe; clearly he was not completely recovered yet.

"I can already use the full power of my Nascent Soul," he said with a smile. Combined with his partially recovered, writhing skin, the smile was utterly gruesome. Four people were left to observe this. With the exception of Lord Revelation, their faces drained of blood. One of them lifted up a trembling hand. In it was a jade slip, which he snapped.

Instantly, his body began to grow blurry; it seemed he was attempting to teleport away.

At the same time, one of the Core Formation Cultivators from the Winding Stream Sect retreated rapidly. Suddenly, a burning fire shot out from his feet, which then wrapped around his body, enveloping him. He seemed to turn into a burning pillar of light as he shot away.

The other person, a Grand Elder from the Cold Wind Sect, suddenly seemed to be growing younger. His face, originally filled with wrinkles, now suddenly appeared to be middle-aged. His Qi billowing, he took three steps, during which time he transformed into a beam of light.

Chapter 83: Patriarch, What About Disciple's Poison...?

As he took the first step, blood and Qi roiled, and he was no longer middle-aged, but a teenager, and he moved three times faster than he had been before.

He took a second step, and his body quivered. His robes fell off, as he had turned into an infant. Again his speed tripled. His body was almost entirely transparent at this point, and a three-colored light began to envelop him.

By his third step, his infant's body had shrunk into a spinning Core. Again, his speed tripled as he shot toward the vortex exit.

These three people were all Core Formation Eccentrics. Obviously, they would not come to such a dangerous place without taking certain precautions. As for everyone else who had died already, things had just happened too quickly. As for these three, if even one escaped, he could spread word to the experts from the great Sects in the Southern Domain, and they would come to slay Patriarch Reliance.

All of this took some time to describe, but happened extremely quickly. As the three of them attempted to make their escape, Lord Revelation chose to stay put, his eyes flickering. His right hand flashed an incantation sign. The large eye on his robe suddenly seemed to come to life. Light sprang forth from it, shining out to target, not Patriarch Reliance, but the three fleeing Core Formation Cultivators.

"You've overstepped your bounds," said Patriarch Reliance in an awe-inspiring voice. He stamped his foot into the ground, whereupon ripples spread out to fill the air. A horrified cry filled the air as the Cultivator from the Winding Stream Sect, who was just about to make his escape, was suddenly thrust back down and into the fourth oil lamp.

At the same time, Patriarch Reliance's right hand slammed onto the ground. It trembled as a restrictive spell appeared, out from which flew a

thin band of black of light that turned into a black skull. The skull circled around Patriarch Reliance, and then shot toward the Cultivator who was attempting to escape via teleportation jade slip.

As the ripples of teleportation spread out, the black skull cackled evilly, then disappeared.

Next, Patriarch Reliance lifted his left hand toward the Core which was shooting toward the vortex. Just as it seemed it was about to enter the vortex, a bloodcurdling cry sounded out and the Core exploded. But the power of the explosion remained contained as it flew back toward Patriarch Reliance.

He snatched it out of the air, and within the white glow could be seen the shape of the Cultivator's body, struggling wildly. Patriarch Reliance squeezed the white glow and it slowly congealed into a three-colored Core. He flicked his sleeve, sending it to light the fifth oil lamp.

At the same time, he waved his left hand, slamming into the light that currently shot forth from the eye on Lord Revelation's robe.

A boom filled the air, and a large amount of cracks appeared on the restrictive spell that covered the ground. Blood dribbled from the sides of Lord Revelation's mouth, and his face grew pale, but his eyes didn't contain the least bit of panic. Instead, they shone with a strange light as he quickly retreated backward.

Massive amounts of life force streamed toward Patriarch Reliance, infusing his body. His face was almost completely recovered. He stood there looking at Lord Revelation, hands clasped behind his back.

"Whose Nascent Soul stage clone are you? You dare to mix with these Core Formation whelps who plot against me?"

"You truly live up to your reputation, Patriarch Reliance," said Lord Revelation with a smile, his voice hoarse. "You could tell with a single look that I'm a clone. However, I'm not here to plot against you. Without me, these Core Formation Cultivators wouldn't have dared to come here. Actually, there is a matter regarding Heavenly luck that I wish to discuss with you." His lips quivered a bit as he finished speaking.

Patriarch Reliance frowned, a thoughtful look in his eyes.

Suddenly, something black flashed up above them. The flying skull reappeared. In its mouth was a three-colored Core. It flew to Patriarch Reliance's side. He flicked his sleeve, and the Core flew to light the sixth oil lamp.

Having seen all this, Meng Hao's heart trembled. He looked at Lord Revelation. It turned out, he was actually just a clone, and yet was at the Nascent Soul stage! Hearing what he said, Meng Hao realized that the goings-on here were more complicated than he had imagined.

"If his clone is at the Nascent Soul stage, then... what stage is his true self at?" Meng Hao took a deep breath, thinking of the three-colored poison pill, his face twisting.

"Patriarch Reliance," said Lord Revelation with a smile, "the Southern Domain is doomed to fall into chaos. What are your thoughts on this matter?"

"You mean the crap about Immortal Li? I couldn't care less. But since you're here with your Nascent Soul, I might as well take the opportunity to replenish myself a bit more." His eyes glittered as he took a step forward and raised his hand toward Lord Revelation.

"Patriarch Reliance, you really should think things through more clearly. You're a simple Spirit Severing Cultivator, do you really dare to defy Immortal Li?" Lord Revelation's face fell as he watched Patriarch Reliance lifting his finger. A boom resounded out as a powerful mist came into being and began to surround him. Patriarch Reliance let out a cold snort.

The mist seethed, and the roaring sound mixed together with the howls of Lord Revelation until it seemed that the Immortal's Cave would collapse. At first, it seemed as if the restrictive spells nearby would disintegrate, but they began to repair themselves before that could happen.

Meng Hao watched on in shock as the restrictive spells fluctuated between collapse and repair. The mist lifted Lord Revelation higher into the air. He let out a bloodcurdling scream as the mist squeezed, causing

blood to squirt out of his body and drench his clothes. His eyes were filled with hatred.

“Demonic art, Wolf Smoke!” Patriarch Reliance’s grim voice rang out into the mist. The mist seemed to devour Lord Revelation. Deep inside, a brilliant light shone out, and the vague image of flames and smoke could be seen. Nothing could be seen clearly, though. Only bloodcurdling screams could be heard.

“Patriarch Reliance, I can do without this clone, but don’t think it will be so easy to consume me!”

The images and feelings seemed to lash against Meng Hao. This battle could no longer be described in terms of magical techniques. He couldn’t even think of any words that would do. Patriarch Reliance’s powerful voice and the howls of Lord Revelation made Meng Hao realize how much beyond the Core Formation stage this battle was.

He stared blankly, his mind reeling, as if a new door along the pathway of life had been opened. This was what being a Cultivator truly was. This was the true path of defiance against the Heavens. This was the true all-powerful might of a Cultivator.

A short time passed, during which the booming continued to sound out. The mist suddenly contracted, then returned to surround Patriarch Reliance. When he looked closely, Meng Hao was shocked to see that Patriarch Reliance’s features now closely resembled Lord Revelation’s.

It was almost as if Patriarch Reliance had occupied Lord Revelation’s body. Then the features began to melt down until Lord Revelation was completely gone, fully absorbed.

An immeasurable amount of black sealing marks rotated around Patriarch Reliance. As he floated there in the air, he exuded an extremely bizarre air.

In his hand he held the small image of a person. Its face was twisted ferociously, but its eyes were shut. It looked ... like Lord Revelation!

This was his Nascent Soul!

The mist dispersed, and everything was quiet. No more breakage appeared on the restrictive spells. They seemed to be in the process of restoring themselves rapidly. From the look of it, it wouldn't take very long for them to recover completely. Patriarch Reliance flicked his sleeve, and Lord Revelation's Nascent Soul shot into the seventh oil lamp. The Nascent Soul acted as oil, and Lord Revelation's life force became flames as the lamp burned.

Lamplight filled the Immortal's Cave, illuminating everything with a flickering light that felt both ghastly and horrific.

Patriarch Reliance looked around, and his gaze came to fall on Meng Hao. He gave him a slight nod, and then turned to head back into the large fissure in the ground.

Meng Hao strode forward several paces nervously. Clasp hands, he bowed, and in a loud voice said, "Patriarch, in order to bring those people here, Disciple consumed some poison pills. Patriarch, can you please dispel the poison?"

"It's just some poison, I can dispel it as easily as taking a breath. Just wait a bit. I need to absorb this Nascent Soul, as well as this guy's true self. Then I'll dispel the poison for you. Don't worry about it. Oh, you did pretty well. I have a reward for you. Take this. This is your prize." Without so much as looking back, Patriarch Reliance flicked his sleeve, sending a low-grade Spirit Stone shooting toward Meng Hao. His body had already landed on the ground, and he was beginning to step into the fissure.

Meng Hao stared blankly at the completely ordinary low-grade Spirit Stone. He clenched his jaw and then spoke again.

"The reward is a low-grade Spirit Stone?"

"Low-grade Spirit Stone?" he said coolly. "That's right. It's a low-grade Spirit Stone. But if you look closely, is it really a low-grade Spirit Stone?" He jumped toward the fissure.

Meng Hao gaped in astonishment, looking back at the Spirit Stone in his hand. As he watched Patriarch Reliance disappearing into the fissure, he spoke again. "Patriarch, you... how long before you can dispel Disciple's

poison?”

“Not very long. It’ll be soon. I only have three, maybe five hundred years of work to do. Okay, well I need to go into secluded meditation now.” He muttered to himself about the difficulty of dispelling poison, and the fact that his Cultivation base wasn’t completely recovered yet. Based on what it would cost him, it wouldn’t be worth it. Furthermore, he had his master plan to think about. As for the Spirit Stone... it really was just a common low-grade Spirit Stone. He didn’t have any qualms about deceiving members of the junior generation. He had done such things many times in the past. He had cheated many Cultivators back during the days of the Demon Sealing Sect. Giving another dry cough to try to gloss everything over, he lowered his head and disappeared into the fissure. As soon as he entered, it closed up behind him.

Chapter 84: Meng Hao, What Are You Doing?

“Patriarch, Disciple went through innumerable trials and tribulations to bring those people here. I don’t mind if there’s no reward, but this poison...” A look of indignation had appeared on Meng Hao’s face. But before he could even finish speaking, the fissure in the ground closed up completely. There was no trace that it had even existed. Patriarch Reliance was nowhere to be seen and didn’t speak. The only things that remained were the seven burning lamps and the flickering light they cast. The seven Cores and the one Nascent Soul let off thin streams of Qi. The streams didn’t emanate up, though. As soon as they left the lamp, they were sucked into the ground.

“Patriarch Reliance, I allowed myself to be poisoned because of you. You’re from the senior generation, and you’re a powerful expert. How could someone as powerful as you do something like this?!”

“I’m neither an expert nor powerful,” replied the Patriarch with a light cough. “I’ve been like this since I was young. And that is not an ordinary Spirit Stone, kid. Your Cultivation Base just isn’t high enough to be able to tell. Wait until you’re at the Spirit Severing stage, then you will know how amazing that treasure is.”

“You... Patriarch, what’s going on? I went through a lot of trouble! Why are you doing this!?” Meng Hao was furious. But everything around him was completely silent. Patriarch Reliance didn’t say anything; in fact, he seemed to be ignoring Meng Hao.

“Patriarch, I don’t need any other rewards. I just need help dispelling this poison. You... Patriarch, Disciple was constantly trying to figure out ways to bring those people here to help you recover your Cultivation base. How can you do this to me?!?!?”

Meng Hao shouted out a few more times, but could see that Patriarch Reliance wasn’t responding. Even though he was just a simple scholar, he was enraged to the extreme at the moment. He had been deceived, and

couldn't help but begin to curse.

"Patriarch Reliance, you're a bastard!" For Meng Hao to say something like this showed that he was exceedingly incensed.

Suddenly, Patriarch Reliance's voice could be heard. "Kid, who do you think you're cursing? Do you really dare to cuss at me? I'll slap you to death!"

"I'm cursing you!" replied Meng Hao angrily. "If you're gonna slap me, then go ahead. I'm poisoned, so I'll die soon anyway. Get out here!"

Patriarch Reliance coughed a couple times. "Ahhhh. Never mind, never mind. I've always had a good temper. Hey, you're the sole heir of the Reliance Sect. At the moment, we're the only people in the whole Sect! I'm not going to get angry at you. Actually, a lot of people have cursed me over the years. It doesn't really matter. Look, you can't really blame me. I can't even go back out! My secluded meditation zone has been sealed. I could only come out if you brought another group of people. I couldn't help you now even if I wanted to." His words became more and more convincing as he spoke. He really had just renewed the seals, and if he wanted to break through, would need to spend several months doing so.

"You bastard!" said Meng Hao, finally understanding the truth of the situation. He could only gnash his teeth and continue to curse. But no matter what he said, Patriarch Reliance didn't respond. In the end, he just started humming a little tune. The happy little tune echoed out, and eventually Meng Hao realized that nothing he did would accomplish anything. Shameless Patriarch Reliance was not going to make an appearance.

His face filled with dark anger, he looked around. There were no bags of holding left behind from the Core Formation experts. Patriarch Reliance was obviously incredibly stingy and had taken them for himself. Meng Hao's gaze fell upon the seven Demonic lamps. Gritting his teeth, he slapped his bag of holding. Ten flying swords appeared and flew straight toward the lamps.

Before they could even get close to the lamps, however, the swords

began to tremble and glow brightly. Then they shattered into pieces.

Meng Hao was livid. Seeing the Qi from the oil lamps seeping into the ground, he smacked his bag of holding again and the two wooden swords flew out. They didn't meet the slightest resistance, but when they reached the oil lamps, they passed right through them, as if they weren't even there. There wasn't the slightest reaction from them.

"A Nascent Soul Cultivator and six Core Formation Cultivators," said Patriarch Reliance, his voice cheerful. "Their spiritual energy is quite abundant. As for your crappy swords, well, my seven demonic lamps are cut off from all other magical items. Non-sentient items can't affect them. Maybe if you were a bit more skilled, you would have some more options. But sorry, you can't steal things from me!" He continued to hum his merry little tune. At the moment, he sat cross-legged in front of a small Feng Shui compass about the size of a hand. The strands of Qi that sank down from above became bright red, and then were absorbed by the compass.

Meng Hao's face grew more and more grim as he retrieved the wooden swords. He had never imagined that Patriarch Reliance, being of the senior generation and having such an elevated Cultivation Base, would treat Qi Condensation Cultivators with such shamelessness. A reward of a simple low-grade Spirit Stone? What was worse was how he claimed the Spirit Stone was an extraordinary object.

No matter from which angle Meng Hao looked at it, it appeared to be completely ordinary. It was nothing more than a low-grade Spirit Stone.

Before, Meng Hao had thought he cared a lot about Spirit Stones. But it turned out Patriarch Reliance was as stingy as an iron chicken from which feathers could not be plucked! He was a complete miser!

"One low-grade Spirit Stone. You bastard, you did this on purpose!" Meng Hao clenched his fists. He felt like he was about to go crazy. Not only were his words impolite, but in his heart, any and all good impressions he'd even had of Patriarch Reliance were wiped clean.

After a while, he turned, his jaw clenched. He wanted to throw the low-grade Spirit Stone away, but finally, he put it into his bag of holding. Then,

he stalked off angrily.

“Aiya, you’re leaving? Okay, okay. Don’t forget to come back some time to hang out with Patriarch! You’re my only heir, and the Sect only has the two of us now. This is your home; you can come back any time. I get lonely sometimes, so make sure to come back and keep me company.” He continued to hum his happy tune.

Meng Hao didn’t say anything. He walked away angrily, Patriarch Reliance’s little tune echoing in his ears.

“Ai, it’s too bad I’m sealed in here, otherwise I would see you off personally.” Patriarch Reliance’s voice was incredibly cheerful as he watched Meng Hao from within his secluded meditation chamber. “Meng Hao, you’re such a good kid. You’re just a bit too uptight. Hopefully in the future you can learn to be a bit more like me.”

“You’re really not going to come out?” said Meng Hao wrathfully. At the moment, he was walking past an area covered with a gray-colored restrictive spell. Suddenly, he stopped walking.

“Of course. Listen, I never tell lies. If I say that I can’t go out, then I can’t. It’s not that I don’t want to help you, it’s just, hey.... Uh. What are you doing?” In the middle of his complacent little speech, he suddenly stopped talking and his eyes went wide.

Meng Hao had turned and was looking closely at a gray restrictive spell. During the battle between Lord Revelation and Patriarch Reliance, the restrictive spells in the entire area had been damaged. They were slowly recovering, but at the moment, there were still cracks visible. Some of the cracks were large enough to be holes, actually, although they were slowly sealing back up.

Within this restrictive spell was a veritable mountain of Spirit Stones. They had been collected by Patriarch Reliance over the course of his entire life. Most of them were low-grade Spirit Stones, but more than a few were mid-grade Spirit Stones, which were far more valuable.

Without a word, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding. A wooden sword appeared and stabbed directly into the hole. Immediately, the sword’s

ability to absorb spiritual energy was manifested. The restrictive spell shook, trying to repair itself, but was unable to. The second wooden sword appeared, and it too was stabbed into the hole. The swords spread apart, and soon the hole was as wide as the hand of a child.

Normally, Meng Hao couldn't do something like this. But because of the cracks and holes in the spell, he had a unique chance.

"What are you doing?" echoed Patriarch Reliance's voice from within the ground. He stared in shock. He had a stingy personality, but enjoyed being able to put his lifetime accumulation of treasures on display. He liked to watch people's eyes turn red when they could look at, but not touch the treasures. He was also supremely confident in his restrictive spells. They were connected to his life force, so unless he died, no one would be able to break through them.

However, because of some strange properties that existed in Lord Revelation, some problems had cropped up when Patriarch Reliance absorbed him. Because of that, the restrictive spells were a bit slow in their recovery. This was a bit of a slip-up on his part.

"Meng Hao, even with that hole there, you won't be able to take all those Spirit Stones," laughed Patriarch Reliance. "There are too many. You won't be able to fit them inside. Oh well, it doesn't matter. I'm a generous person. Go ahead and take a few, I don't care."

Meng Hao let out a cold harrumph. Now that the wooden swords had opened up a hole, he reached deep into his robe and pulled out the bag of the Cosmos and aimed it at the little hole.

Meng Hao's Cultivation base charged into action like a wild horse. The mountain of Spirit Stones began to shudder, and then, one by one they began flying out of the hole, sucked into the bag of the Cosmos.

Faster and faster, the Spirit Stones flew into the black-hole that was the bag of the Cosmos. Patriarch Reliance watched the dazzling display, and a horrified shriek rang out from his mouth.

"A bag of the Cosmos.... Dammit, how can you have that! It's invisible to Spiritual Sense, and can contain mountains and rivers. You, you, you.... My

Spirit Stones! I went through innumerable trials and tribulations throughout my life to accumulate that many Spirit Stones. Meng Hao, leave some behind for me!" His agonized cry continued to echo out, and the ground began to quake. He was obviously releasing some of his power. And yet the seal had just been put in place....

Meng Hao laughed coldly as he listened to Patriarch Reliance's miserable cries. Soon the mountain of Spirit Stones shrank to become a small hill. Meng Hao was truly venting his spleen.

"You dare to rip me off?" thought Meng Hao, gritting his teeth. "Then I'll rip you off even more! I'm going to clear out all of your treasures!"

"Meng Hao, you traitor! This is too excessive!" Patriarch Reliance felt as if the organs in his body were going to explode. He wanted to burst out of the seal, but it had just been put in place. It would take months before he could break it.

He could never have imagined that Meng Hao would have a bag of the Cosmos, nor that he would be able to snatch away his lifetime accumulation of Spirit Stones. At the moment, Patriarch Reliance felt as if a giant invisible blade were rotating around him, slashing him for every Spirit Stone that he lost.

It was as if he were being hacked to pieces. His heart ached.

He had always had a strange personality. In comparison to other Cultivators of his generation, he was a true weirdo. His greed and stinginess grew along with his Cultivation base and his age. He didn't have even the slightest bit of an aura of a powerful expert. He didn't seem to have a bottom line in anything either.

Several hundred years ago, during his first Severing, his Dao enlightenment had been regarding greed. You could say that it had been branding onto his spirit, and was a part of his Cultivation.

Chapter 85: Ancient Demon Sealing Jade

Greedy and stingy. A miser to the core, even in terms of Cultivation. This was his Dao. In his enlightenment, treasures were the most important thing. These were the things that led to his First Spirit Severing.

This was why his meditation zone had so many areas protected by restrictive spells. It was his life savings. Accumulating all these items was not just a hobby, it was his version of the Dao.

To see it all disappearing before his eyes filled him with grief and indignation.

Within the space of ten breaths, the mountain of Spirit Stones was gone. There was even a random piece of jade underneath the mountain. It too was sucked into the bag of the Cosmos.

“That was my good luck charm. Dammit, Meng Hao, leave my good luck charm behind. You....” Before he could finish speaking, his eyes went wide again. After taking all the Spirit Stones, Meng Hao looked around, his eyes gleaming. Patriarch Reliance began to tremble.

The look in Meng Hao’s eyes was like that of a master thief.

His gaze fell onto a small courtyard. Behind the cracked restrictive spell could be seen a variety of medicinal herbs of many different colors. They were clearly beyond ordinary.

Meng Hao recognized some of the herbs as ones described in Shangguan Xiu’s treasured turtle shell. As he strode forward, his fingers flickered, and the two wooden swords appeared. They stabbed into a crack in the shield created by the restrictive spell. The crack slowly widened.

“Meng Hao, are you really going to steal my treasured items too? I’m your Patriarch! I paid a heavy price to steal that medicinal courtyard all those years ago....” Patriarch Reliance was growing even more anxious. The rumbling noise from under the ground grew stronger, but Meng Hao didn’t even blink. He was happy to finally be able to vent his anger.

“My divine spirit herbs... you, you... you’re plucking them all out!”

Patriarch Reliance's anger soared to the heavens. "That's my Arabic Tree. I cared for it for hundreds of years before it sprouted, you can't take it...." Amidst Patriarch Reliance's shrill protestations, Meng Hao cleared out the courtyard as cleanly as if he'd used a razor. He sucked everything into the bag of the Cosmos. By the time he withdrew the two wooden swords, the courtyard looked as if it had been swept by a massive gale.

"Enough, enough," said Patriarch hastily, looking over the emptiness. "Listen, little Patriarch, leave some things behind for old Patriarch here. Don't take anything else.... You're not allowed to touch any more of my things. Meng Hao, you listen to Patriarch, okay? As a member of the junior generation, you should have a bit of respect. You...."

"I've been like this since I was young," said Meng Hao with a cold snort, throwing Patriarch Reliance's words back at him. Looking around, he caught sight of a lone restrictive spell shield. Beneath it were what appeared to be three withered little trees. However, on each tree was a leaf that occasionally sparkled with arcs of energy, making them appear extraordinary.

Meng Hao had never seen anything like it, but considering this was Patriarch Reliance's meditation zone, and it was protected with a restrictive spell, he figured it must be very valuable. His eyes glittering, he strode over and stabbed the wooden swords into a crack in the still-recovering restrictive spell.

"Those are my Thunder Rattan Leaves. It's a Thunder type medicinal herb that's even rare in the Southern Domain!" Patriarch Reliance once again howled fiercely. Completely ignoring him, Meng Hao lifted the bag of the Cosmos up to the hole in the restrictive spell. The trees began to shake back and forth. Then, the three leaves ripped off of the trees, transforming into three arcs of black lightning which shot into the bag of the Cosmos.

Even more infuriating to Patriarch Reliance was that after the leaves entered his bag, Meng Hao didn't stop. The trees continued to sway back and forth until suddenly they flew up from the ground, roots and all, and were sucked into the bag of the Cosmos. Next to the trees was a little

purple flag stuck into the ground, which was also sucked into the bag.

“You even... you ripped the Thunder Rattans up by the roots and took them too! You’re really pissing me off!! Meng Hao, you little bastard, you took the Lightning Flag as well? It’s not very strong; it can only defend against a Foundation Establishment attack. But it can absorb lightning bolts! You need it to grow the Thunder Rattan Leaves!! Patriarch Reliance’s heart dripped with blood as he howled and cursed in his subterranean chamber.

“I’ve always had a good temper,” snorted Meng Hao, throwing more of Patriarch Reliance’s words back in his face. “You’re Patriarch of the Reliance Sect. At the moment, we’re the only people in the whole Sect! I of the junior generation am not going to get angry at you. Actually, a lot of people have cursed me over the years. It doesn’t really matter.” Once again, he looked around.

This caused Patriarch Reliance’s heart to seize. When he saw Meng Hao’s gaze slide past another area with medicinal herbs, he let out a small sigh of relief. His meditation zone contained his life’s accumulation of treasures, but even still, the treasures could be categorized into high and low quality items.

“Just don’t touch my baby,” thought Patriarch Reliance. “Everything else... they’re just trifling worldly possessions. I can gather more together later if I want.” Patriarch Reliance’s teeth were clenched, but his heart still continued to drip blood. In actuality, the word “trifling” had been a bit forced.

Within moments, Meng Hao had cleared out a few more courtyards of medicinal herbs. Then he moved on to another area. Patriarch Reliance could only clench his jaw. He could do nothing more than let loose a torrent of abuse upon Meng Hao. He cursed and cursed, never repeating himself for more than half a sentence.

As he cursed, Meng Hao started to hum a little tune. It was a happy little tune, and just so happened to be the one Patriarch Reliance had been humming earlier. When Patriarch Reliance heard it, it made him so mad

that he almost coughed up blood. The feeling he experienced was impossible to describe, but suffice to say, he was now experiencing the full repercussions of incurring Meng Hao's wrath.

Patriarch Reliance watched as Meng Hao looked around. When his gaze came to fall on a stretch of short wall, Patriarch Reliance's heart began to race, and he furiously said, "You little bastard, you're too cruel! I didn't dispel your poison, that's all. I even gave you a reward. A low-grade Spirit Stone is still a Spirit Stone."

Meng Hao had inspected almost all of the restrictive spells for cracks. In this area, many of the restrictive spells were completely recovered.

He circled the area, his eyes flashing back and forth. Suddenly, he realized that Patriarch Reliance had stopped speaking. He had only taken about thirty percent of the treasures in the area, and most were medicinal herbs. He still wanted to vent some anger, so he decided to make one more circle to check for damaged restrictive spells.

When he returned to the place he'd started from, he frowned. There didn't seem to be anything special in there. He looked around and noticed a stretch of short wall. When he started to walk toward it, Patriarch Reliance suddenly began talking again.

"Alright, alright. Meng Hao, you're my only heir." As Patriarch Reliance watched Meng Hao walking toward the short wall, he grew more and more anxious. But his anxiety couldn't be detected in his voice. He sounded somewhat emotional as he said, "I'll dispel your poison. Just wait three months. I'll break out and take care of it for you. Then you can give me my treasures back. What do you say? Don't worry, I always keep my word. This time, I'll swear it in the name of the Sect. I definitely won't deceive you."

Meng Hao stopped walking and looked down at the ground. His eyes flickered, and he didn't say anything. He walked around, seemingly lost in thought; eventually he drawing close to the short wall.

"I never said that I wasn't going to dispel the poison," said Patriarch Reliance. He let out a sigh. "It's just that dispelling the poison would

require quite a sacrifice of my Cultivation base. I would have to spend a lot of the energy I had just absorbed.” His voice seemed to be deep and profound, but in actuality, as he saw Meng Hao nearing the short wall, his heart was filled with acute nervousness.

Meng Hao was silent. After the space of several breaths, he suddenly spoke.

“Why did you start talking when I began walking toward this wall, Patriarch? And why did you suddenly mention dispelling my poison? Could it be that there is some special treasure hidden here?” As the words came out of his mouth, Patriarch Reliance’s eyes went wide. He realized he had said the wrong things. He secretly cursed Meng Hao for being so crafty.

“I’m just trying to do the right thing,” said Patriarch Reliance with a cold harrumph. “Look kid, you...” Before he could finish speaking, Meng Hao jumped over the wall.

This filled Patriarch Reliance with fear and trepidation. His heart began to pound and his face fell. After leaping over the wall, Meng Hao looked around. As it turned out, there was a restrictive spell here.

It didn’t look very special. Sealed inside was a jade slip. As for the restrictive spell, it was not complete; it still had some cracks in it. Meng Hao had no idea what the jade slip was, but without hesitation, he flicked his sleeve, stabbing the two wooden swords into the spell. He pried open a hole, then used the bag of the Cosmos to retrieve the jade slip.

Seeing the jade slip disappear into Meng Hao’s bag caused Patriarch Reliance to emit a shrill shriek. The ground shook so hard it seemed it might crack. Before, Patriarch Reliance had been upset to see Meng Hao taking his treasures, but this fury was much more intense.

“Meng Hao, you cannot take that jade slip away! Even I don’t dare to go near it. It belongs to a friend who left it here for safe keeping. You do not have the latent talent or the destiny to touch it! Do not remove it!”

Paying him no heed, he leaped onto a flying sword and flashed toward the vortex exit. At the same time, he slapped the bag of the Cosmos and

pulled out the jade slip. Pressing it between his eyebrows, he cast some spiritual power into it. His expression changed as three characters appeared in his mind, filled with a Demonic aura.

“Demon Sealing Sect....”

“Meng Hao, you little bastard, get back here! You wait until I break through this seal. Then you’re finished!” Patriarch Reliance let out a furious howl.

As the howl echoed out, Meng Hao’s eyes flashed. He stopped at the mouth of the vortex, and then looked back down.

His eyes began to glitter. When Patriarch Reliance saw this, his heart began to thump again, and a strange premonition filled his heart. In his heart, in his mind, Meng Hao looked like nothing more than out-and-out thief.

Chapter 86: Demonic Lamps that Separate Heaven and Earth!

“Break through the seal?” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he glanced down at the seven oil lamps on the ground. He looked at them for a moment, then shot toward them.

He ignored the howls of Patriarch Reliance. After pillaging all the previous treasures, he was now certain that the Patriarch wouldn’t be coming out.

“What are you doing!?” In his subterranean chamber, Patriarch Reliance’s fury rose to new heights. However, seeing the look on Meng Hao’s face, fear blossomed in his heart. He was starting to regret having let Meng Hao go. The look in his eyes was even stronger than the look which had appeared when Meng Hao began to steal his treasures.

Ignoring Patriarch Reliance, who he now knew was completely unreliable, Meng Hao stared at the seven lamps. He walked slowly around them, looking contemplative.

Every step he took seemed to land directly onto Patriarch Reliance’s heart.

“It doesn’t matter,” Patriarch Reliance said in an attempt to comfort himself. “This little bastard is only at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. He can’t take any of the spiritual energy from the demonic lamps....” His eyes went wide when he saw Meng Hao, after making a few circles around the lamps, sit down cross-legged to meditate.

Meng Hao sat there, his eyes flashing. He seemed hesitant, but before long, determination filled his eyes.

“Patriarch Reliance deceived me. Taking a few of his precious treasures isn’t enough to calm me down. I’m going to take this spiritual energy as well. Then I will finally be able to relax.” Meng Hao gritted his teeth when he thought about the single low-grade Spirit Stone the Patriarch had given him. And then there was the matter of the poison. As far as Meng Hao

was concerned, not dispelling the poison had shoved him onto a road of hopelessness.

“Treasured items can’t absorb the spiritual energy from the seven lamps, because they aren’t sentient.... Fine, I’ll absorb it myself!” He suddenly closed his eyes and circulated his Cultivation base, attempting to breathe in the spiritual energy pouring out of the burning oil lamps.

But no matter how he tried to absorb the spiritual energy, as soon as it left the oil lamps, it was sucked into the ground. Deep in his subterranean chamber, Patriarch Reliance let out a great sigh of relief.

“Meng Hao, you little punk, whatever you try will be useless. Do you really dare to try to steal my spiritual power?” Patriarch Reliance let out a hearty, although somewhat bitter, laugh. When it reached Meng Hao’s ears, he frowned for a moment. Then his face became calm again.

“No need to get antsy, Patriarch,” he said coolly. “I’ve only just begun.”

Patriarch Reliance stared in shock.

Meng Hao’s eyes, which he had just closed, moved about as he recalled the image of his battle with Shangguan Xiu, and Little Tiger’s pearl which had enabled him to reach the tenth level of Qi Condensation.

This was the method he wished to employ. He would return to the tenth level of Qi Condensation. Even though the incredible power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation left him cut off from heaven and earth, Meng Hao wanted to see if it could enable him to absorb the spiritual power of the lamps.

The legendary tenth level of Qi Condensation had existed in ancient times, but was now prohibited by the Heavens, cut off. But Meng Hao... had reached the tenth level once before... he had walked the severed path.

As he gathered his thoughts and his breath, his body gradually seemed to grow withered. The slender strand of Spiritual Sense in his head seemed to fill his thoughts. He sank into a strange and unusual state as he focused his entire being on remembering what it had been like to enter the tenth level of Qi Condensation.

Time slipped by. A day, two days, then three. Patriarch Reliance was growing more nervous. He couldn't quite tell what Meng Hao was doing, but could tell that his body was changing in a very strange way.

"Just what are you doing?" he asked hesitantly, as he came to realize that he was unable to discern what Meng Hao was up to.

On the night of the third day, a tremor shook Meng Hao. His eyes opened, and his body began to tremble violently. Once again he felt power filling his body; he now could employ force strong enough to topple a mountain. At the same time, the powerful suction force once again appeared within him, and he was cut off from heaven and earth!

At the moment, he couldn't absorb any of the spiritual energy of heaven and earth. His eyes glowing, he slowly stood up, fighting to remain in this state. He knew that without Little Tiger's pearl, he could only hold on for the space of about ten breaths, after which he would sink back down.

He took a deep breath and then took a step forward. As his foot fell, the spiritual power emanating from the lamps quivered. Then, one tiny strand, instead of being sucked into the ground, drifted toward Meng Hao and was absorbed into his body.

When he saw this, Meng Hao's eyes shone even brighter. As for Patriarch Reliance, his body trembled and a look of astonishment appeared on his face.

"Holy crap!" he cried. "This is impossible!! That's... the tenth level of Qi Condensation! Dammit. Wasn't the path to the tenth level severed by the current will of the Heavens? You, you, you.... You got to the tenth level of Qi Condensation?!?!"

Patriarch Reliance let out a miserable cry as he watched Meng Hao take three more steps forward. About ten percent of the spiritual energy from the lamps rushed toward him. As he absorbed it, Patriarch Reliance howled even louder. "How is it possible? The damned tenth level of Qi Condensation isn't that awesome, but it was prohibited because it has the power to steal luck from the Heavens. If it's strong enough to do that, then as for my spiritual energy... Dammit. And what about my Demon Sealing

Jade? Back then, those old bastards said that it could only be taken and used by someone who had reached the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation. This, this....”

After three steps, Meng Hao’s body began to tremble, and he couldn’t go any further. Boundless spiritual energy from the lamps rushed into him. Panting, he sat down and began to meditate, absorbing tremendous amount of spiritual energy. Patriarch Reliance could only howl angrily.

The suction force inside him was astonishing, like a starving wolf who hadn’t eaten for years. Vast quantities of spiritual energy were sucked into him, and as it was, his body began to tremble more and more violently. He felt his physical body growing tougher and more powerful. It seemed as if even his bones were absorbing spiritual energy and becoming stronger.

The ancient tenth level of Qi Condensation was a stage of refinement for the physical body. Now here, in Patriarch Reliance’s Immortal’s Cave, he was seizing luck for himself and entering this ancient state.

This level required lots of spiritual energy. Heaven and earth would not give it, but Patriarch Reliance had prepared a Nascent Soul and six Cores as fuel, and life force as flame. The spiritual energy pouring out of the demonic lamps was the nutrition that Meng Hao needed.

“Meng Hao!!! Stop! Stop! Let’s discuss things a bit. I need that spiritual energy. I really, really need it. DO NOT absorb it! Dammit, cut it out, Meng Hao. That’s my spiritual energy. I went to a lot of trouble killing all those people to get it. My seal! Meng Hao, if you don’t stop, then I will expel you from the Sect!!” Flustered and exasperated, Patriarch Reliance had already forgotten about the treasures Meng Hao had taken, as well as the Demon Sealing Jade. You could say that all the things taken by Meng Hao before couldn’t compare at all with this.

Meng Hao ignored him, continuing to absorb the spiritual energy like mad. His body continued to grow stronger. Soon, cracking sounds could be heard as his skin began to split and new flesh and blood grew.

More and more cracks spread out, and then the old flesh began to fall off. Meng Hao’s hair grew longer, and his eyes brighter. The tenth level of

Qi Condensation was now completely solidified within his body!

He would never lose the tenth level again, it was there permanently. In addition to the power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation, Meng Hao realized he had a new ability; if he wished, he could at will return to the ninth level of Qi Condensation to absorb the spiritual energy of heaven and earth, and then return back to the tenth level.

Some time passed, and Meng Hao's mind began to reel. The remnants of dried up flesh which remained on his body turned into ash and drifted away. His eyes glowed even brighter, and an incredible feeling of power filled Meng Hao. He was completely confident that with the power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation, he could use a single fist... to crush anyone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

This power was even stronger than what he had experienced when using Little Tiger's pearl.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. He stood up, not to leave, but to take another step forward. He was now only five paces away from the seven oil lamps.

Panting furiously, Patriarch Reliance let loose a torrent of intense curses as he watched Meng Hao absorbing an even greater amount of spiritual energy. He had solidified his tenth level of Qi Condensation, but instead of leaving, he moved on. Patriarch Reliance's heart pounded.

Now, thirteen percent of the spiritual energy emitted by the lamps was rushing toward Meng Hao. As the boundless amount of energy entered his body, a roaring sound filled him. His eyes were filled with determination. He took another step forward. He was now only four paces from the oil lamps.

The flames flickered as even more spiritual energy flew toward Meng Hao. As of now, he was taking sixteen percent!

"The suction force within me is not dispersing, it's actually growing stronger. Is it possible that... after the tenth level of Qi Condensation, there's an eleventh level?" Gritting his teeth, he called upon the power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation to take another step forward. He was

now only three paces from the seven lamps. The flames within the lamps danced wildly as twenty percent of the spiritual energy they produced was sucked up by Meng Hao.

He took a deep breath, then sat down cross-legged to meditate.

Chapter 87: I Shall Reach the Peak of the Thirteenth Level of Qi Condensation!

“Meng Hao....” Patriarch Reliance ground his teeth. He felt quite grieved, and was even more regretful. If he had known things would turn out this way, he would have said some nicer things to Meng Hao.

How could he have imagined that Meng Hao would be so cruel? Forget his cruelty, he had a bag of the Cosmos! Forget his bag of the Cosmos, he had entered into the tenth level of Qi Condensation!

The scene unfolding before him made him want to weep, except he had no tears to do so. He gnashed his teeth as an even further sense of trepidation filled his heart. He remembered the requirements of the Demon Sealing Jade; it could only be taken away and used by someone who had reached the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation. When those old bastards had said that back in the day, his heart had filled with contempt. He’d believed that he could prevent the legacy of the Demon Sealing Sect from continuing on to future generations. But, now that he saw Meng Hao passing into the eleventh level, his trembling heart filled with anxiety.

Unfortunately for him, there was nothing he could do other than grit his teeth and continue to absorb as much spiritual energy as possible. He needed to get more than Meng Hao did, and be faster at doing so. He needed the Feng Shui compass in front of him to be completely repaired, and prevent Meng Hao from advancing any further.

The spiritual energy being sucked into the ground and absorbed into the Feng Shui compass was bright red in color. It seemed as if it were sucking something out of the very earth it passed through.

“Dammit, Meng Hao. All I did was give you a low-grade Spirit Stone and not dispel your poison. Haven’t you gone far enough? Haven’t you? I’m still your Patriarch after all.” Patriarch Reliance felt profoundly wronged.

As for Meng Hao, a roaring sound filled his entire body. With twenty percent of the lamps’ spiritual energy being absorbed into him, his body

was trembling, and he felt himself changing. The change was occurring to his Core Sea. It grew larger, and as it did, his Qi passageways grew thicker. A bang rang out in his head, and he felt the sensation of breaking through to another level.

The eleventh level of Qi Condensation!

His Core Sea spread out to fill his entire body. This type of Core Sea really was impossible for someone of the Qi Condensation stage. Its majesty would ensure unending future growth and fighting power.

It would be more difficult for Meng Hao to establish his Foundation with such a Core Sea but... if he succeeded, then he would be twice as powerful as someone of the same stage!

The eleventh level of Qi Condensation does not refine the body, but the Core Sea!

The extent of his Core Sea caused Meng Hao's body to be filled with a thunderous sound. Spiritual energy as boundless as a sea filled him. The waves of the Core Sea crashed and churned limitlessly.

Meng Hao opened his eyes and took a deep breath. The sound of the intake of his breath was like a clap of thunder. He stood up, his eyes gleaming with persistence. He took another step forward. Then two. Then three!

He now stood directly next to the seven oil lamps, close enough to touch them. He was absorbing thirty percent of their spiritual energy.

Thirty percent might not sound like a lot, but it would be impossible for Meng Hao were it not for the abilities of the tenth level of Qi Condensation. That was the stage of Qi Condensation that could steal luck from the Heavens, after all.

"Meng Hao, aren't you finished yet...." Patriarch Reliance watched Meng Hao take his three steps forward, his anxiety increased even more. If Meng Hao reached the twelfth level, he would be only one step away from being able to use the Demon Sealing Jade.

"Many thanks for your help, Patriarch," said Meng Hao calmly. "I'll be

finished soon.” He closed his eyes and began to absorb more spiritual energy into his body. His body shook as he stepped into the twelfth level of Qi Condensation.

Since ancient times, no one had ever entered... the twelfth level of Qi Condensation.

The instant he did so, Meng Hao felt a severe pain in his mind. His Spiritual Sense didn’t go anywhere. But he felt as if his mind were being split in two. Now he felt... something like a stream within his mind.

This was... the Sea of Perception!

In modern times, Cultivators who broke through from the Qi Condensation into Foundation Establishment would form a Sea of Perception from nothing. Usually, this type of Sea of Perception would not be very large. It had nothing to do with latent talent, but rather with the method used. Obviously, the larger the Sea of Perception, the more power it could wield, and the more boundless the Cultivator’s Spiritual Sense would be.

In ancient times, Cultivators preferred to break through to Foundation Establishment in the twelfth level of Qi Condensation. This is because the twelfth level is when the Sea of Perception opens up. By practicing Cultivation in this fashion, the Sea of Perception would be far more powerful than others of the Foundation Establishment stage.

In the modern Cultivation world, Meng Hao was the first Cultivator to ever enter the twelfth level of Qi Condensation. If news of this spread, it would shake the entire Cultivation world.

At the moment, Patriarch Reliance was shaken. He stared dumbly at Meng Hao, able to watch unimpeded as Meng Hao’s previous ninth level of Qi Condensation now rose to the twelfth. He didn’t know what to say.

“...In ancient times,” he muttered, “the legends said that the Great Circle of Qi Condensation could be completed at the thirteenth level. But even in ancient times, such a thing was rarely seen. It was said that the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation was related to the luck of heaven, and.... could change the latent talent of a Cultivator! It wouldn’t change much. But

latent talent is birthed from the Heavens, so even the slightest change would definitely be a defiance of the Heavens.

“I don’t remember how many years ago it was that the old bastards from the Demon Sealing Sect boasted that I was incredibly lucky... but compared to me, this kid is the lucky one. Dammit, he’s too lucky! How could I have possibly provoked this reaction!”

As Patriarch Reliance spoke, Meng Hao opened his eyes. They shined with a profound light. He felt splitting pain within his head, but within that pain, he also could sense an unprecedented clearness.

The world seemed different when he looked at it, although he couldn’t quite tell which particular things weren’t the same. It was as if everything now shone with radiances that he had never noticed before.

At this time, the massive suction power seemed on the verge of dissipating, as if his body knew that he was reaching his absorption limit.

Soon, the amount of spiritual energy he was absorbing from the oil lamps dropped from thirty percent to twenty, and then to ten.

This caused Meng Hao to frown. He could tell that his Cultivation base had not reached its peak... he could sense that there was another layer beyond his current layer. He could feel the Great Circle of Qi Condensation.

It was a powerful feeling, but as the suction power grew weaker and weaker, it seemed as though that next level would be forever closed off to him.

“Haha, it’s like I said,” laughed Patriarch Reliance, his eyes glittering. “The thirteenth level of Qi Condensation was even rare in ancient times. It was such a thing of legends that you could basically say it didn’t exist. The twelfth level is the limit. Meng Hao, there’s no need to try any further. Quickly, back away. Don’t get in the way of my master plan. If you do, then just wait till I get out of here and see how I mop the floor with you! You need a spanking, you little bastard!” Even though Meng Hao had sucked away some of the spiritual energy, it actually wasn’t very much. There was still enough left to accomplish his master plan. And if Meng

Hao didn't reach the thirteenth level, then there was no way for him to have the required latent talent to use the Demon Sealing Jade.

"Seems this kid's luck isn't that amazing after all," said Patriarch Reliance complacently. But then, Meng Hao's eyes flickered. He had a stubborn personality. Now that he had reached the twelfth level of Qi Condensation and caught a glimpse of the next level, he would do everything possible to break through.

"The suction power is weakening.... How can I continue to add spiritual energy..." Meng Hao's mind spun with thousands of possibilities until finally his eyes began to glitter and he smacked his bag of holding. The two wooden swords whistled out.

He looked at them, then gritted his teeth and caused one of them to fly straight toward himself. Patriarch Reliance watched on in astonishment as the sword slashed Meng Hao. Soon, over ten gaping wounds covered his body.

Meng Hao clenched his jaw as the sword slashed the bloody marks across him. His eye shone with determination. As the blood splashed from the wounds, Meng Hao felt the spiritual power in his body seeping out as well.

This was exactly what he wanted!

As the spiritual power leaked out of his body, the suction power within him suddenly trembled, then gradually grew stronger. When this happened, Meng Hao's mind was set. Taking control of the second sword, he sent both of them flying around him, slashing his body with wound after wound. In the blink of an eye, nearly one hundred cuts covered his flesh.

The wounds sent the physical power of his body into action, and at the same time caused the suction power within him to grow more and more powerful.

Patriarch Reliance was simply dumbstruck. He could never in his wildest dreams imagine that Meng Hao would use such a method. When he saw the multitude of bloody wounds, and the determination in Meng Hao's

eyes, it gave him a deep sense of how ruthless Meng Hao could be. If he could treat himself with such cruelty, how ruthlessly could he treat others?!

The more wounds that covered him, the stronger the suction became. The amount of spiritual energy he siphoned from the lamps jumped from ten percent to forty. And yet, even though the spiritual energy poured into his body, he couldn't break through to that next level.

After some time passed, Meng Hao laughed. With a cold smile, he raised his right hand, causing one of the wooden swords to whistle around and fly toward his chest. It stabbed through him, sending out fountains of blood. Blood also sprayed out of his mouth. Instantly, the spiritual power in his body dropped by a huge percentage. This, in turn, caused the suction power to climb higher by several percentages.

By now, he was absorbing fifty percent of the spiritual energy coming from the seven oil lamps.

A booming sound rang out. Filled with boundless spiritual energy, Meng Hao launched everything at the barrier between the levels. Blood sprayed from his mouth, and the wooden swords once again slashed through his body. The spiritual energy from the seven lamps surged; as of now, Meng Hao was sucking away seventy percent of it!

It was in this way that Meng Hao launched his attack from the twelfth level of Qi Condensation into the thirteenth.

Time slipped by. More wounds appeared on his body, a product of Meng Hao's ruthlessness. Soon, his body began to tremble and his vision grew blurry. He was now absorbing ninety percent of the spiritual energy from the seven oil lamps. It was as if he were bathing in thick, pure spiritual energy.

"You're going to kill yourself...." Patriarch Reliance watched the scene, his breathing agitated. Meng Hao's stubbornness left him reeling.

"I will become powerful! There's no reason. I must become powerful!" Meng Hao began to lose consciousness, but his stubbornness wouldn't allow him. Despite his current condition, he wouldn't even think of giving

up. He continued to murmur to himself, that he, must, become, powerful!

Meng Hao MUST break through to the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation.

“This is his Dao...” Patriarch Reliance took a deep breath, finally understanding.

Chapter 88: Lord Revelation's True Self

Boom!

The two wooden swords stabbed simultaneously through Meng Hao's body, sending showers of blood flying out. The flame of Meng Hao's life force was growing dimmer. However, the suction power within him had grown to an unprecedented height. It was so strong that it seemed as if it might be able to suck in everything around him. It was as if regardless of whatever obstacle faced him, regardless of whatever danger he was in, nothing could block his path to becoming a powerful expert.

The suction power seemed to be affecting Meng Hao's stupor. His mind expanded into boundlessness.

Patriarch Reliance looked at him and murmured, "This is... stealing luck from the Heavens!"

At the moment, Meng Hao's desire to be powerful had fused with his Cultivation base, a stubbornness which belonged to the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation; he would steal from the Heavens; he would defy the Heavens to change his life force.

A thunderous boom sounded out as the full and complete spectrum of spiritual energy from the seven oil lamps poured into Meng Hao. As it entered his body, it became his blade with which to attack and break through the level gap.

It was the combined power of six Core Formation Cultivators and one Nascent Soul Cultivator. But that was only part of it. The most important part of his attack, the truest part, was his stubborn desire to become powerful. This desire was completely in line with the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation, which had been rejected by the Heavens. This was what forged his thirteenth level of Qi Condensation!

Amidst the roaring, the level gap disintegrated. The instant it did, Meng Hao, bathed as he was in inexhaustible spiritual energy, felt his Cultivation base soaring up from the twelfth level to the thirteenth level. He had now become the first Cultivator since ancient times to complete

the Great Circle of Qi Condensation.

In that instant, the latent talent in Meng Hao which enabled him to practice Cultivation, suddenly changed. There was no sound or any other indication that it had happened. Even Meng Hao was only vaguely aware of the change. However, if an outsider were to examine his current latent talent, they would see that it was no longer average, as it had been in the past. Although he couldn't be considered Chosen, his latent talent was now much higher.

From time immemorial, no one had ever been able to change their own latent talent. No heavenly material or earthly treasure had the power to change the destiny appointed by the Heavens. And yet today, Meng Hao had done just that!

He was the first person since ancient times to complete the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, as well as the first person to change his latent talent. This was a new beginning, a fresh start on the path to becoming a powerful expert.

The instant he completed the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, all of the wounds in his body healed instantly. Immersed in spiritual energy, his body had experienced another rebirth.

You could even say that Meng Hao himself had been reborn anew.

After the time it takes for an incense stick to burn, Meng Hao's eyes flashed open. The surrounding spiritual energy once again began to surge down into the earth. Now that he had completed the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, the suction force within him was completely gone.

Having witnessed Meng Hao's transformation with his own eyes, Patriarch Reliance was left speechless.

Even more astonishing was that after Meng Hao opened his eyes, he reached out with his right hand and picked up one of the seven oil lamps. This was the lamp which contained Lord Revelation's Nascent Soul. After picking it up, he turned, and his body turned into a beam of light as he shot toward the vortex exit.

“You, you, you... aren’t you afraid of getting burned to death!?” Patriarch Reliance sat in a daze for a moment, and then started cursing again as he watched Meng Hao disappear through the vortex.

“You little bastard! You’re shameless!! You people from the Demon Sealing Sect are all bastards! Shameless to the extreme!!” He paced back and forth furiously, letting out a torrent of howls.

As soon as Meng Hao left through the vortex, the Immortal’s Cave began to seal up behind him. Only a rapidly closing fissure remained, from which emanated the stench of death.

Within the Southern Domain, outside of the State of Zhao, was a bordering country called the State of Revelation. The land itself wasn’t much different from that of the State of Zhao, but its people were somewhat bizarre.

Whereas the State of Zhao revered the Eastern Lands, the State of Revelation did not. They did not pay obeisance to the Great Tang, but rather, the mysteries of the Heavens. Therefore, all the Sects within the State of Revelation were branches of the Revelation Sect.

In the mysterious eastern regions of the State of Revelation were three mountain ranges which wound back and forth like twisting dragons. One particular mountain peak had the appearance of two dragon heads locked in combat. This was the pinnacle of the State of Revelation. Mist curled around the peak, on top of which was a bell. Once per year, the bell would toll, and the echoes would reverberate out for three days.

Beneath the bell was a forest of ornate buildings. This was none other than... the most powerful Sect in the country, the Revelation Sect!

Atop the main gate of the Revelation Sect sat a Cultivator who wore black robes. He was very old, and had the demeanor of a transcendent being. In the memories of the disciples of the Revelation Sect, it had been a very, very long time since he had sat down there in meditation. No matter how the wind and rain buffeted him, no matter how many years passed by, he sat there like a rock, eternally still.

Many disciples didn’t even know who he was. Considering how he sat

cross-legged in meditation underneath the Revelation Bell, he was clearly an Elder of the Sect. However, whenever the powerful experts of the Sect looked at him, their eyes would fill with intense looks of veneration.

At the moment, the Revelation Sect was filled with the uninterrupted sound of disciples chanting scriptures. The sound formed an invisible force which drifted about, then slowly congealed at the top of the mountain, where there seemed to be some type of vortex. The vortex would slowly suck in the power of the chanting.

This was something that only Cultivators could see. The chanting of the Revelation Sect disciples rose up and then merged into the Revelation Bell. In fact, the bell seemed to be sucking in, not just the chanting of the Cultivators, but the prayers of everyone in the entire country.

At this moment, the old man who had been sitting under the Revelation Bell for seemingly an eternity, began to tremble, and then coughed up a mouthful of blood. Suddenly, the bell tolled, its sound echoing into the sky and sounding out through the entire State of Revelation.

The disciples within the Revelation Sect were shocked. The Sect Elders and powerful experts instantly opened their eyes from meditation. One by one, they turned into prismatic beams which shot toward the Revelation Bell.

When they arrived, they saw the black-robed old man sitting there, his eyes wide open.

“Greetings, Patriarch!”

“Patriarch, are you in good health?” Dozens of Cultivators surrounded him, bowing respectfully with clasped hands.

The black-robed old man’s eyes flashed as if with lightning. His left pupil blazed with an intense brightness and looked like the sun, whereas his right pupil exuded darkness and had the appearance of a crescent moon. The two pupils were completely different. One look at this man, and you would never be able to forget him.

When he opened his eyes, it seemed as if the space between his

eyebrows split, and another eye appeared. However, this was an eye invisible to others. The only thing an observer would see was a blood-red glow. Above him, storm clouds began to gather, and a fierce wind whipped about.

“Patriarch Reliance! You destroyed my clone and refused my good intentions. You’re... You’re finished! I’m not the only one with a few tricks up my sleeve. What do you have to fall back on, your trifling Spirit Severing? You truly dare to arouse the wrath of Immortal Li?!” The old man’s face was grim. He slapped his hand onto the ground, and the mountain peak trembled. Ripples shook the ground, sending the surrounding Cultivators retreating in shock.

At the same time as the mountain began to shake, the Revelation Bell sounded out, then rose up into the air. Surrounding the bell were countless magical symbols which flew and twisted about, glowing brightly. The glow was nearly blinding, and spread out throughout the entire State of Revelation.

“The Demonic forces are descending! It is exactly as our ancestors divined! This shall prove to be a calamity for heaven and earth, but also a chance for Revelation to rise! I shall take back my clone’s Nascent Soul, and then we will see if Patriarch Reliance still dares to be arrogant!”

Of course, this black-robed man was none other than Lord Revelation. His clone had been consumed by Patriarch Reliance, and this was his true self. As he spoke, he stood and flew up into the sky. He snatched up the enormous Revelation Bell and then transformed into a multicolored rainbow and shot toward the State of Zhao, radiating killing intent.

Meanwhile, within the state of Zhao, a buzzing sound could be heard within the ancestral hall of the Cold Wind Sect. With a strange look on his face, the disciple on duty pushed open the door. When he looked inside, his entire body began to shake, and a look of astonishment and intense dread appeared on his face.

Within the ancestral hall, the life slips of various Sect Cultivators were neatly lined up on display. Suddenly, the life slips belonging to the Sect’s

Core Formation Priest as well as Elder Taishang began to crack and crumble!

This meant that the Core Formation Priest and Elder Taishang had died!

Furthermore, the slips belonging to the Foundation Establishment Elders fell apart. When this happened, the disciple on ancestral hall guard duty shook. A look of disbelief filled his face.

When the Core Formation Priest had departed with the others, he'd left behind a Foundation Establishment Elder to guard the Sect. When that man learned of the news, his face went pale, and he immediately ordered that no one be told. He knew that if something like this happened to a Sect, if its Core Formation experts were killed, it was nothing other than a catastrophe. It would likely lead to the downfall of the entire Sect. For almost all of the Foundation Establishment Cultivators to be wiped out would only hasten the fall.

“What happened in Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone?!” The Foundation Establishment Elder immediately gathered a group of Qi Condensation disciples and sent them in the direction of the Reliance Sect.

Next, trying to calm his mind, he took hold of a special horn that hadn’t been sounded out for hundreds of years.

This horn had a name: Horn of the Dao.

Sounding the Horn of the Dao would awaken the Sect’s Dao Reserve!

Every Clan and Sect had a Dao Reserve, which would be passed down from generation to generation. For the three great Sects, their Dao Reserve would be a Sect Patriarch who had failed in reaching the Nascent Soul stage, but postponed death by resting in suspended animation in a False Nascent Soul condition. Only they would be able to suppress the panic that would arise because of the impending catastrophe.

When the horn call sounded out in the Cold Wind Sect, it reached the ears of an old withered man sitting cross-legged in a top-secret Immortal’s Cave. He looked dead; his body was so emaciated it was little more than

skin and bones. But when he heard the call of the horn, his eyes opened.

His Spiritual Sense instantly roared out, enveloping the entire Cold Wind Sect. When it entered the body of the Foundation Establishment Cultivator, the man began to tremble, and a look of pain appeared on his face. He was filled with a powerful feeling that seemed as if it could obliterate him. This was Spiritual Sense, which was being used to rifle through his memories.

After a while, the Spiritual Sense departed, and the Foundation Establishment Cultivator fell to the ground panting, his body limp and his face pale. He knew that if he wasn't of the Foundation Establishment stage, the memory search that had just been performed on him would have killed him.

A profound voice echoed out throughout the Cold Wind Sect. "Take my Freezing Jade and seal off all the mountains around the Reliance Sect. Do not let anyone out of the region. I will be awake in a few hours. In the meantime, you go search the area for any clues." The Foundation Establishment Cultivator immediately struggled to his feet, then clasped his fists and bowed deeply.

An ice-cold piece of blue jade flew into his hand.

Similar scenes played out in the Winding Stream Sect and the Upright Evening Sect. When the life slips belonging to their Priests and Elders crumbled, they all used their Sects' Dao Reserves.

As of this moment, the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao had been thrown into an uproar.

Chapter 89: Guyiding Tri-Rain

Patriarch Reliance sat in his sealed meditation zone, the flames of his fury rising to the heavens. He cursed continuously in anger and pain. Regarding Meng Hao, the Patriarch had a somewhat helpless feeling. After all, he was the Reliance Sect's only heir....

"That little bastard is just too ruthless. I'm his Patriarch! First he steals half my treasures, then takes away my Demon Sealing Jade. After that, he robs me of my spiritual energy, and then shamelessly pillages one of my demonic lamps!!" He was nearly out of breath from cursing. When he thought of the ancient demonic lamp, he suddenly looked worried.

"Okay, so I didn't dispel the poison, that's true, but that doesn't mean you can act like this! An upright person should be reasonable. When I stole treasures from people, I discussed things with them reasonably first.

"He really reached the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation. All those years ago those bastards said that the Demon Sealing Jade couldn't be taken away by someone who hadn't reached the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation.... Originally I thought they were just trying to make it sound mysterious, and was really happy. Obviously, those old bastards tricked me. If the Demon Sealing Jade couldn't be taken away, then even if my plan worked, I wouldn't be able to break the seal. But... wow! He actually reached the thirteenth level!! And the little bastard took it away! I can feel that... the seal is weakening!

"I might be missing one of the demonic lamps, which reduces the chances of opening the Demonic Seal, but still, it's been unstable for years now. And now, it's showing even more signs of weakness... Holy crap, how come the Cultivators of the Demon Sealing Sect always deceive me!? Those bastards were like this years ago, and now the little bastard is the same..." Patriarch Reliance ground his teeth, but as he thought about all this, he remembered Meng Hao throwing his words back at him. Then he thought of his stubbornness in reaching the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation, and couldn't help but sigh.

“This kid really does things in line with my style. I didn’t want to put myself in a bad position that time; you deceived me, I deceived you. The old bastards from the Demon Sealing Sect didn’t tell the truth. They thought that if they ran away, I couldn’t get at them. Well, maybe that was true, but at least I could change the name from Demon Sealing Sect to Reliance Sect. I couldn’t deceive them, but I could deceive their descendants.... Dammit, if I’d known Meng Hao would reach the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation and then get the required latent talent to take away the Demon Sealing Jade, I would have just dispelled his poison and sent him on his way as fast as possible. Then he would never have had the chance to reach the thirteenth level. But if that happened, then I probably would never have the chance to open the seal, right?” Patriarch Reliance was somewhat at a loss. Even though he was upset, he could only sigh and feel torn.

Patriarch Reliance had a very eccentric personality and was not easy to get along with. Meng Hao didn’t know that, of course. In fact, before the Sect had been disbanded, no one else had known either. Only the people who were of the same generation as Patriarch Reliance could know of such matters. To them, the mere mention of Patriarch Reliance would arouse feelings of hatred.

But you cannot use normal methods to analyze people with eccentric personalities. For example, even though Meng Hao robbed his treasures, stole his spiritual energy, took away one of his demonic lamps and angered him to the point of driving him crazy, he actually felt admiration for him. This type of thing is not something that ordinary people can understand.

Actually, if Meng Hao had just silently left, then Patriarch Reliance would have forgotten about him completely within a couple years. But acting as he did had left a deep impression on Patriarch Reliance. He would never be able to forget the complicated, torn feelings he was experiencing.

Outside of the Reliance Sect, in the State of Zhao, it was a warm and sunny day. However, storm clouds were brewing on the horizon. Meng

Hao's face was calm as he sat cross-legged on his treasured fan. He soared forward at high speed.

He had lowered his Cultivation base back to the ninth level of Qi Condensation. He wouldn't reveal the Great Circle of Qi Condensation unless he needed to. Even though his achievements were significant, the poisons in his body had not been dispelled. It was like a fishbone stuck in his throat. He sat in silent contemplation, trying to figure how to get rid of the poison.

"Of the four poisons, I was able to get rid of one. Excepting the poison from the three-colored poison pill, the other poisons will be easy to dispel.... I need to figure out the fastest way to find the poison dispelling pills." Regarding everything that had happened with Patriarch Reliance, Meng Hao's hatred and anger had already subsided.

He glided along, and before long thunder and lightning filled the sky; big raindrops the size of beans fell down. The land was covered with sheets of rain, making everything look dim and hazy.

It was raining now, but the general temperature was as hot as ever. The heat was stifling enough to make it difficult to breathe. Only within the rain could a bit of coolness be felt.

Amidst the heavy rain, Meng Hao stopped gliding and stood atop a mountain top. Looking off into the distance, he pushed the rain away so that it wouldn't fall onto him. It was like he was standing in his own land, separate from the rest of the murky world.

He looked out at the earth surrounding him and thought of all his experiences over the past years. He had completed the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, which seemed like something from a dream. After thinking about everything for a long time, he sighed.

"I wonder... I wonder how Elder Sister Xu is doing now," he said softly as her face appeared in his mind. He looked off in the direction he supposed was the center of the Southern Domain.

He lifted up his right hand, and a jade slip appeared. The jade slip was carved with mountains and rivers, and was covered with cracks. It looked

as if it might crumble at any moment.

This was what Patriarch Reliance had called a good luck charm, which he had found at the bottom of the mountain of Spirit Stones. He looked at it closely, then sent a bit of his spiritual energy into it. There was no reaction.

Muttering to himself, he put the good luck charm back and then pulled out the palm-sized black flag. There appeared to be a spark of energy moving about inside it. Muttering to himself again, he opened his mouth and blew out some Qi from his Cultivation base, sending it into the flag.

“This item isn’t sealed to Patriarch Reliance, so I can use it. I’ll need to refine it a bit before I can use its full power, though....” He infused it with some more Qi before putting it back.

Next, he carefully brought out the burning oil lamp, within which was a tiny figure sitting cross-legged. When Meng Hao pulled out the burning Nascent Soul, streams of spiritual energy once again roiled out.

Flames appeared in front of his eyes, but he didn’t feel any heat. However, he knew that it was powerful. After all, the flame was life force and the Nascent Soul was the fuel.

“This item will be extremely useful. I can use it as a life-saving treasure!” Eager to the extreme, Meng Hao tucked it back into the bag of the Cosmos.

At last, he pulled out the ancient jade piece. It carried a sense of profound ancientness, as if it had existed for countless ages.

Meng Hao looked at it, heart thumping. He sent some spiritual energy into it, upon which three characters appeared in his head. “Demon Sealing Sect....”

Some mnemonics also appeared, which he couldn’t quite see clearly. Only the first three characters were legible.

He poured a greater amount of spiritual energy into it, whereupon a roaring sound filled his head. He involuntarily took a few steps back and immediately stopped forcing spiritual energy into it. He could tell that

someone who hadn't completed the Great Circle of Qi Condensation would only be able to see the three characters and a bit beyond that. As of now, he was only able to read the first line.

"An ancient path, persist in attempting to seal the Heavens, the Mountain Sea Realm, the vast Heavens, Great Benevolence, great calamity shall be faced in the Ninth Mountain and the Ninth Sea, my life shall last an eternity." Meng Hao's body trembled and suddenly his vision cleared. The rain was currently falling on him, soaking him.

A strange light filled his eyes. He looked back down silently at the jade slip. In his head, images appeared of the Demonic technique used by Patriarch Reliance, and the Demonic magic Shangguan Xiu had used to control the Qi of Mount Daqing.

After contemplating for a long time, he still didn't understand. He sat down cross-legged, again pouring some spiritual energy into the jade slip. Once more, he contemplated the words' deep meaning.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. The rain had come quickly, and it passed quickly. Meng Hao suddenly opened his eyes. Even as a child, he had been very smart. Even though he hadn't succeeded in his life as a scholar, once he entered the Reliance Sect, he had been very quick to grasp magical techniques. He didn't need to spend a lot of time practicing. In fact, this was the first time he had ever had trouble utilizing a mnemonic.

It was as if the mnemonic was something which required enlightenment to understand. Without enlightenment, it could only be observed from the outside, never entered.

"The words seem extremely complicated, their true meaning obscure. It's like trying to look at flowers in the midst of fog, or the moon on rippling seawater...." He pondered silently for a while, until a bright look appeared in his eyes. He lifted his head and gazed up at the sky, looking a bit hesitant.

More time passed. Finally, determination rose in his eyes. He leaped up, and a flying sword appeared beneath his feet as he shot off into the

distance.

“If I can establish my Foundation, then I can fly for long periods. That will be much better than this.” The wind buffeted his face as he soared forward. After a while, the flying sword’s momentum began to fade. Meng Hao dropped to the ground and continued to run.

Time passed slowly. The first time he had left these mountains, he had been at the sixth level of Qi Condensation, and it had taken him two days. Now, he was of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, and it only took about an hour. Soon, he was out of the mountains, and had reached the North Sea.

He stood once again on the shore, looking out at the lake. He took a deep breath, and then, face filled with sincerity, clasped his hands and bowed deeply two times.

The first bow was for the North Sea’s kindness in demonstrating the Dao and helping him break through his bottleneck.

The second bow was for when the North Sea had helped him during his battle with Ding Yan, when it had saved his life and caused him to be reborn.

“I’ve already made my promise two times, so I won’t say it again. It has been imprinted onto my heart.” He lifted his head, looking out toward the center of the lake. After some time, he closed his eyes and sat down cross-legged to meditate. In his mind, the mnemonic from the jade slip appeared.

“An ancient path, persist in attempting to seal the Heavens, the Mountain Sea Realm, the vast Heavens, Great Benevolence, great calamity shall be faced in the Ninth Mountain and the Ninth Sea, my life shall last an eternity.” A long time passed, and the words continued to reverberate in his mind. And yet, he still did not understand what they meant.

More time passed as Meng Hao continued to try to decipher the meaning of the words. Suddenly, a hearty laugh echoed out from across the lake.

“Young sir, do you want to cross the sea?”

Meng Hao lifted his head and saw a boat approaching. On the boat was an old man wearing a woven rush raincoat. Inside was a young girl, eight or nine years old, with big eyes. When she looked at Meng Hao, an innocent smile appeared on her face.

Meng Hao laughed, clasping hands and bowing to the old man and the girl. Then he leaped up onto a flying sword and shot toward them. He dropped down into the boat.

Just like before, there was a bottle of alcohol being warmed. The young girl took it out and poured a cup for Meng Hao, but didn't hand it to him. She put her chin onto her hands and looked at him.

“Big Brother, why did you come back?” she said, her voice pure and clear. “Did you come to see Guyiding Tri-Rain?”

Meng Hao stared at her blankly.

“Guyiding Tri-Rain is my name. But, you can't tell anybody, okay Big Brother?” She laughed and winked at Meng Hao, looking very charming.

Meng Hao smiled and cupped his hands again in a bow, then accepted the cup of alcohol.

The old man laughed as the boat continued on toward the center of the lake. He looked back at Meng Hao. “We haven't seen each other for many days. Young sir, your demeanor is much more refined than in the past. Are you heading for the other shore this time?”

“I of the junior generation am not here to cross the lake,” Meng Hao said lightly, taking a sip of alcohol. “I'm here to clear up some confusion.”

In the original release of this chapter, the author challenged the audience to figure out the meaning of Guyiding Tri-rain's name. There was much debate about it. Here is the breakdown of her name:

Chinese characters: 古乙丁三雨

Transliteration: Gu Yi Ding San Yuan

My Translation: Guyiding Tri-rain

Characters:

古 – Gu – ancient, old

乙 – Yi – second; the second of the Heavenly Stems; bent; winding

丁 – Ding – surname; man; fourth of the Heavenly Stems

三 – San – three

雨 – Yu – rain

Previous related chapters about the North Sea:

Chapter 44: The North Sea Reveals the Dao

Chapter 66: A Great Kindness!

Chapter 90: The Great Path of Demon Sealing, a Concept Like a Scripture

The old man put down the oar and looked back at Meng Hao. Laughing, he walked over, poured himself some alcohol, and then took a drink.

“Clear up what confusion?”

Meng Hao held his cup of alcohol and then softly said, “I’m confused about something I read. It said, ‘An ancient path, persist in attempting to seal the Heavens....’” Shock suddenly covered the face of the old man. The blood drained from the face of the young girl. Waves suddenly surged across the North Sea, causing the boat to rock back and forth violently.

“Stop!” cried the old man. The cup of alcohol in his hand suddenly disappeared into a dark mist and he stared at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao gaped.

“Don’t say that again. I can’t explain those words to you. Neither can anyone else in heaven or earth. If you truly seek enlightenment, then enter the heart of the sea.” He closed his mouth and looked at the young girl. Some time passed, and finally her countenance returned to normal. She gave a slight nod.

Meng Hao was silent for a while, before asking, “What do you mean by the heart of the sea?”

In a tone of voice which carried deep profundity, the old man said, “There are things which have been concealed at the bottom of the sea for a thousand years. That is the heart of the sea. If you seek an answer to your questions, perhaps you should also examine your own heart.”

Meng Hao found himself lost in thought for a long time. When he finally looked up, his eyes widened in shock. There was no trace of the old man or the young girl. He was alone on the lake. In fact, the boat had disappeared too.

He stared blankly for a while, until his vision came to focus on a spot

some distance away. There, on the far bank, a group of people was a brand new boat into the water. It slowly entered the lake, and then laughter rang out. The sounds of the peoples' celebratory cheers surrounded the boat.

The boat slowly approached the center of the lake. Rowing it was a middle-aged man, accompanied by a woman and a child. Meng Hao watched as, day after day, year after year, he rowed back and forth across the lake. Many years passed, and the man grew old. The man's son grew up, and took over rowing the boat. Years and years passed. Generations and generations.

The boat, once brand new, slowly began to crack and grow old. It began to age.

Eventually it grew so dilapidated that it couldn't be repaired. Like a life that has reached its limit, it couldn't be forced to go on any further. It slowly sank to the bottom of the lake.

It had lived its life on the surface, and died at the bottom. Its existence had been on the waters of the lake, accompanying generation after generation of mortals who had created it. Other than them, the lake was its entire life.

In its life, the lake was its companion. No one could hear the voice of the lake, but it could. When it sank to the bottom, it died, but was also reborn.

At that moment, it awoke.

The moment it awoke, it saw a young girl standing at the bottom of the lake, smiling at him.

"Will you... accompany me forever?"

"I don't know how long forever is, but in my past life, I could hear your voice. Now that I've died... I want to accompany you. I want you to be part of my next life." At this moment it came to understand that... it was the spirit of the boat. Listening to the voice of the lake over the countless years had caused the boat's spirit to come into being.

Before dying, its life had been the waters of the lake. After death, its spirit would protect the lake forever, into eternity.

It was then that a boat once again appeared on the surface of the lake. Inside the boat was a young girl warming a bottle of alcohol. Together, they floated to and fro across the lake.

Meng Hao's mind shook as he saw all of this transpire in front of him. Everything grew blurry for a moment, and then came back into focus. He was once again in the boat. The old man was there in front of him, grinning at him and holding his cup of alcohol. The girl looked up at him, smiling, her chin resting in her hands.

The old man took a drink. "This is my heart. Do you understand... successor of the Demon Sealing Sect?"

Meng Hao was silent for a moment. Frustration shined in his eyes. He... did not understand.

"Don't search too hard for an answer. If you do, the answer you find might be false. At some point in your life, perhaps you will be able to find the answer. Don't give up." The old man looked at Meng Hao solemnly.

"Big Brother," said the young girl, "its Qi ... is beneath your feet. Don't provoke it. Remember... the great path of Demon Sealing..." Waves once again surged across the lake in all directions, great, tall waves that seemed to touch the sky. Everything turned dark amidst the thunderous roar. The boat sank into the water.

Meng Hao didn't leap out of the boat. Instead, he closed his eyes. After some time passed, he opened them, and found himself sitting cross-legged on the lakeshore. The lake was still. There were no waves and no boat. What that had just happened had been an illusion.

The girl had not appeared, nor had the old man. Everything had occurred in a dream.

"Its Qi is beneath my feet..." Meng Hao's eyes shone with confusion. He looked down at his feet. He saw nothing but his shoes.

"The great path of Demon Sealing, a concept like a scripture." Meng Hao frowned, still unable to comprehend the meaning of the words. He slowly got to his feet, then clasped his hands and bowed a third time to the lake.

He looked out at the waters. "I don't understand today," he said softly, "but I will achieve enlightenment one day."

Waves suddenly rippled out upon the lake, seemingly in response to Meng Hao. Meng Hao was just about to leave, when suddenly his eyes flickered. Turning his head, he saw that off in the distance, several beams of light were flying toward him.

"Meng Hao!"

"So here you are. The Priest sent us searching for you!"

"Grab him, and then everything will be made clear!"

There were three flashing beams, and three Cultivators. One of them was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, the others were at the eighth. All three of them rode massive jade flutes. The two eighth-level Cultivators were known to Meng Hao. They were Zhou and Tu of the Winding Stream Sect, who had attempted to chase and kill Meng Hao before.

The person of the ninth level of Qi Condensation was a young man of about thirty years of age. A cold, indifferent look covered his face as he stared at Meng Hao.

They were being followed by five more people who sped along on foot.

Meng Hao's expression was calm. He gave the people a glance, then ignored them, bowing once again to the North Sea. As he did, the eyes of Zhou and Tu flashed. Their hands flickered with incantation signs, and dark clouds began to accumulate in the sky, accompanied by the rumble of thunder.

The young man of the ninth level slapped his bag of holding, and an enormous drum appeared. He beat the drum once. It emitted a thunderous boom which caused surrounding rocks and dirt to leap up into the air and fly toward Meng Hao.

At the same time, a lightning bolt shot toward Meng Hao. As it approached, he calmly made a fist and punched the lightning.

A boom echoed out as the it shattered, transforming into a multitude of sparks which then dissipated into the air. Meng Hao's eyes flashed.

"Are you looking to die?!" he shouted. He leaped forward, and a whistling flying sword appeared beneath his feet. He transformed into a multicolored beam of light as he shot toward the three people flying above him. At this moment, the mass of flying dirt and rocks was almost upon him. He punched a fist toward it.

The power of the thirteenth level of Qi Condensation, the Great Circle of Qi Condensation, erupted within Meng Hao's body. He was now cut off from the spiritual energy of heaven and earth. However, the approaching cloud of sand and stones was smashed into nothing by the power of his fist. A massive wind rose up. His three opponent's faces filled with shock as they felt a force like that of a mountain pushing against them.

They spat up blood, especially Zhou and Tu. Their jade flutes shattered, and they retreated, their faces filled with astonishment. Even as they moved backwards, two sword auras shot past them. Their heads flew into the sky, showering blood everywhere. Two Cultivators of the eighth level of Qi Condensation, dead in an instant.

Meng Hao turned and looked at the ninth-level Winding Stream Sect disciple. His face was pale and his body trembled as he retreated. The people on the ground had stopped moving, astonished expressions on their faces.

"What... what is the level of your Cultivation base!?" said the ninth-level Winding Stream Sect disciple, his heart trembling, disbelief covering his face. In his mind, someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation couldn't simply kill two eighth-level Cultivators in one instant. Perhaps he was... Foundation Establishment?

However, although Meng Hao emanated an enigmatic air, it was not the power of Foundation Establishment. Therefore, the Winding Stream Sect disciple was incredibly surprised and bewildered.

Even as the words came out of the man's mouth, Meng Hao moved forward, his face tranquil. Seeing this, the Winding Stream Sect disciple's

heart began to race. He turned and fled.

Unfortunately for him, he was only of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Even if he could go a bit faster, his speed could never come close to matching Meng Hao, who was of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. He had barely begun to flee before Meng Hao was next to him. Meng Hao's fist descended.

The ninth-level disciple's pupils constricted, and a profound sense of life-and-death danger encompassed him. With a low shout, he slapped his bag of holding. Several flying swords appeared, as well as a drum and a jade slip covered with mystical carvings.

Meng Hao's expression did not change in the least bit. His fist continued to descend. The flying swords shattered into pieces. The drum made a crashing sound as it exploded. Next was... the jade slip.

This jade slip could withstand an attack from someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. But Meng Hao was of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. The jade slip was incapable of blocking him. It was shattered into tiny pieces.

None of these things were even slightly capable of providing a defense. The Winding Stream Sect disciple was now out of magical items. He watched wide-eyed as Meng Hao's fist came closer and closer, until it landed onto his chest.

A bang rang out. This Winding Stream Sect disciple was famous in his Sect, and was even known throughout the State of Zhao. But now, his chest sank in, and a fountain of blood shot out of his mouth. Like a kite whose string has been severed, he tumbled backwards seven or eight meters, dead.

From beginning to end, it took the space of a few breaths for Meng Hao to kill three people!

The rest of the Winding Stream Sect disciples on the ground had looks of profound fear written on their pale faces. It was hard to tell who fled first, because they scattered almost immediately. The only thought in their minds was: run!

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever, but inside he sighed. Because of the incident with Yan Ziguo, Meng Hao had learned the importance of leaving behind no witnesses. He knew that killing must be done resolutely. Even though he didn't want to, attacking... was a necessity.

The old Meng Hao would never have made a move against the fleeing people. But today was different. Meng Hao's eyes flashed. Ten flying swords flew out, infused with the power of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. The quality of the swords was poor, and incapable of containing such power, so they exploded, transforming into countless fragments, which continued to fly forward.

Blood-curdling screams rang out one after another. Each and every one of the fleeing Winding Stream Sect disciples dropped dead.

Chapter 91: What Goes Around Comes Around

Fire Globe after Fire Globe descended onto the corpses. The reek of blood still filled the air, but it was soon overpowered by the stench of scorched flesh. The disgusting odor emanated out in all directions.

Meng Hao collected the bags of holding. He sniffed the air, then with one last silent look at the North Sea, turned and left.

“I can’t stay in the State of Zhao any more... I need to leave.” Meng Hao knew that if the Winding Stream Sect had appeared, then the rest of the three great Sects must also be aware of the deaths of their Priests and Elders. Soon, the mountains would be crawling with Qi Condensation Cultivators seeking to determine how they had died.

Meng Hao frowned. Looking off into the distance, an image appeared in his mind, a map of the Southern Domain. On the other side of these mountains was a vast plain which was the border of the State of Zhao.

“It’s not far, but things will get violent here very soon. I can’t stay any longer.” Meng Hao changed his direction. These mountains belonged to the region of the Reliance Sect. He would leave the State of Zhao by a different route.

With his mind made up, Meng Hao raced forward. Unfortunately, before he could get far, his eyes narrowed, and he dropped to the ground. Frowning, he looked off into the distance with cold eyes. A few dozen kilometers ahead of him, an enormous glowing shield was descending from the sky. It transformed into countless flakes of flying snow which cut off the Reliance Sect outer reaches from the rest of the world.

Floating in the sky off in the distance was a middle-aged man wearing a long black robe. His Cultivation base was at the Foundation Establishment stage. In his hand he held a piece of frozen jade. Beams of light twirled around it slowly. This magical item was the source of the flying snow shield that surrounded everything, sealing it off.

Surrounding the man were seven or eight Qi Condensation Cultivators, with dignified looks on their faces. From their clothing, Meng Hao could tell that they were from the Cold Wind Sect.

“No wonder they’re called the three great Sects. Even with so many Foundation Establishment Elders dead, even more appear.” Meng Hao’s heart sank as he realized that this seal had completely cut off his path of escape. He had no way to leave now. Before he had time to examine the situation further, he suddenly shot backward. The flying snow shield had suddenly begun to contract rapidly.

As it did, it completely froze the land and trees it passed. It moved rapidly, heading directly toward Meng Hao’s position. Of course, it wasn’t targeting Meng Hao; this was just a normal function of the sealing spell. The contraction wouldn’t last for long; it would move inward a few hundred kilometers, then slowly come to a stop.

Meng Hao was not very far away from it. As he retreated, he had no time conceal his movements. As it approached, he hopped onto a flying sword, transforming into a beam of light, which of course attracted the attention of the Cold Wind Sect Cultivators.

“That person....”

“It’s Meng Hao! I saw his picture!”

“So, it’s Meng Hao. The Priests and the others are looking for him. Seize him! Then we can finally understand what happened here!” The eyes of the Cold Wind Sect Cultivators glowed with ill intentions.

“All of you, go capture him,” said the Foundation Establishment Cultivator. “I’m consolidating the sealing spell and still need few moments.” Having just activated the seal contraction, he wasn’t able to leave his position. However, as far as he was concerned, Meng Hao was incapable of escape.

As soon as the words left the man’s mouth, the seven or eight Cold Wind disciples shot after Meng Hao in pursuit.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. He shot forward, the seal contracting behind

him, the Cultivators right behind it, hot in pursuit.

As he raced forward, the Cold Wind shield grew closer and closer, until it was only about ten meters away. Finally, it slowed down and stopped contracting. It became a thick shield of ice, covering the entire Reliance Sect mountainous regions.

The seal was actually not completely solidified. If he was only at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he would not have been able to tell. But he was of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. Looking at the seal, he could tell that it would not last for very long.

“I can’t get out, and I can’t kill my way out. I need to get over the mountains as fast as possible. Looking at this seal, I can tell it will start to loosen up soon. Once it does, I can make my escape.” Meng Hao gritted his teeth. He knew that this plan was a bit of a stretch, but he didn’t have many other options. Finding a way to conceal himself for a bit of time would do, but first he had to take the initiative to get out of his current situation.

Eyes gleaming, he ceased his retreat. Instead, he stood there, watching coldly as eight Cold Wind Sect Cultivators approached.

“Eight people in all. Two of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, four of the eighth and two of the seventh. They all have magical flight items. It seems the three Sects are quite anxious. They didn’t spare any cost at all to get here as quickly as possible.” Meng Hao glanced back at the Foundation Establishment Cultivator; he was maintaining the spell and couldn’t move at the moment. However, as a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, he was extremely powerful. He floated there, looking coldly at Meng Hao.

As their gazes locked onto each other, the eight other Cultivators shot through the flying snow shield. This was one of the strange properties of this particular shield; it could be entered into, but not exited.

The eight people descended onto Meng Hao, their faces twisted with vicious grins. He sprang into action.

His clenched his right hand into a fist, stepped forward, and smashed it into the ground. The power of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation

exploded out as a gale force wind slammed into the eight Cultivators. They stopped in their tracks, shock written on their faces.

At the same time, two wooden swords appeared in Meng Hao's hands. They screamed through the air, and the heads of the two seventh-level Qi Condensation disciples flew into the air.

"One breath," said Meng Hao to himself. The Foundation Establishment Cultivator had said he only needed a few moments. Meng Hao wasn't sure if that was true or not. Either way, his own requirement was that he wipe out these eight people within the space of ten breaths.

Amidst the whistling screams of the wooden swords, the remaining six disciples scrambled to pull out magical items. Before that could happen, Meng Hao spun, dashing toward one of the eighth-level Cultivators. He didn't use a magical item, but rather his shoulder.

Boom! Meng Hao slammed into him, and blood shot out of his mouth. His body caved in, and as he flew backward, Meng Hao flicked his right hand. A massive Flame Python appeared, twenty meters long. Roaring, it shot toward another eighth-level Cultivator. A blood-curdling scream rang out as the Flame Python consuming him whole.

"Four breaths." In four breaths, Meng Hao had killed four people. The remaining four looked on in shock. Meng Hao had attacked with a viciousness they had never before seen. Now that he had revealed the power of his Cultivation base, the remaining four Cultivators trembled, unable to comprehend what was happening.

Off in the distance, the Foundation Establishment Cultivator looked on in shock. Moments ago, he had seen that Meng Hao was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation; but in the space of a few breaths, his Cultivation base had suddenly climbed to an incredible height.

"Six breaths." Meng Hao's hand flickered in an incantation, and the sword auras from the two wooden swords spilled out. The remaining two Cultivators of the eighth level of Qi Condensation tried to defend with magical items as the swords shot forward. Horrified screams rang out as their hearts were stabbed through. Their bodies fell to the ground.

Now, only two Cultivators remained, both of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Their faces pale, they had already begun to edge backwards. When Meng Hao's cold gaze fell upon them, they scattered, each one running off in a different direction.

With a cold look on his face, Meng Hao raised his right hand, which flickered with an incantation. A massive Wind Blade appeared, five or six meters long. It sped forth with a shrill whistling sound. At the same time, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding. The black bow appeared in his hand. He drew back on the bow, and then shot an arrow toward the other person.

"Eight breaths," said Meng Hao softly. Two booming sounds rang out. The Wind Blade slashed through the first ninth-level Cultivator, splitting his body in two and sending blood and gore splattering everywhere.

Simultaneously, a black arrow pierced the other Cultivator's head, causing it to explode violently.

Eight breaths, eight kills!

Meng Hao, expressionless, looked out through the flying snow shield at the Foundation Establishment Cultivator for a moment. Then his body transformed into a glittering beam and he shot off into the distance.

He moved about, avoiding quite a few Cultivators. But the area covered by the sealing spell was not large. With so many Cultivators of the eighth and ninth levels of Qi Condensation, it wouldn't take them long to search everywhere. As for Foundation Establishment Cultivators, they could fly, and would be able to search even faster.

Meng Hao continued to evade detection, until finally he approached the Reliance Sect itself. It was then that ten beams of light appeared in the sky, soaring forward at top speed. In the lead of this group of people was a grim-faced old man. Unlike the others who surrounded him, he was not soaring, but actually flying.

Cultivators of the Qi Condensation stage could not do this; this man was clearly a Foundation Establishment Cultivator!

“The Upright Evening Sect....” Catching sight of them, Meng Hao sighed. He finally came to accept that he would not be able to escape this day. He could try to hide, but he would be found eventually.

“Meng Hao!” Upon catching sight of him, the faces of the Upright Evening Sect Cultivators twisted. The old man of the Foundation Establishment stage raced toward Meng Hao, his eyes shining.

Meng Hao’s eyes grew dark as he watched the Foundation Establishment Cultivator approach. The massive power of the Foundation Establishment stage roiled out from the man. The immensity of this power caused the surrounding Qi Condensation Cultivators to shrink back, their Cultivation bases teetering.

This was the might of Foundation Establishment. He flew through the air with seemingly no effort, imposing to the extreme. Without even trying, he caused the Qi Condensation Cultivators to tremble.

But Meng Hao was not an ordinary Qi Condensation Cultivator. A thirteenth-level Cultivator of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation had not been seen since ancient times. He had Spiritual Sense. Although it wasn’t very strong, it was there. His Cultivation base was not thrown into chaos like the others.

His physical body was more powerful, his Qi vessels tougher, even his bones were stronger. Despite facing up against a powerful Foundation Establishment expert, he refused to retreat back even half a pace.

“So, the person who created all these waves in the State of Zhao is a Cultivator halfway to the Foundation Establishment stage,” said the Foundation Establishment Cultivator coolly. “Today, however, if I say you shall die, then die you shall.”

Just then, another beam of radiant light appeared from behind Meng Hao. It screamed toward them. This was none other than the Cold Wind Sect’s Foundation Establishment expert. He radiated a killing aura.

“I tread the path of Cultivation, and am not ignorant of the rules of life and death,” said Meng Hao coolly. “I can kill others, so naturally, others can kill me. But let me ask you a question. You three Sects permitted

Shangguan Xiu to absorb the life force of the mortals of three counties. He even damaged their longevity. Mortals do not practice Cultivation. Harming a Cultivator is one thing, but you, for selfish personal gain, permitted such a horrific act. This is a violation of the theory of law. What goes around comes around!" He had wanted to say these words for a long time.

"Theory of law? In heaven and earth, the powerful people make the laws. And if what goes around comes around, then you've got something coming to you, wouldn't you say?"

Meng Hao said nothing. He simply looked up into the sky.

Chapter 92: Exterminate Foundation Establishment!

In front of Meng Hao was the old Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Upright Evening Sect. Behind him was the enraged Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect. As of this moment, Foundation Establishment Cultivators from two of the three great Sects of the State of Zhao had appeared.

In his heart, Meng Hao knew that he was stuck between a rock and a hard place. It would be difficult to escape. Theoretically, he could lead them into Patriarch Reliance's secluded meditation zone, but to do that would require the cooperation of Patriarch Reliance himself.

Considering everything that had happened between the two of them, and also considering the Patriarch's temperament, it was doubtful he would help out. Furthermore, Meng Hao had already used that ruse that once. The chances of tricking more people in the same way was not high. In the end, though, he had little choice but to try.

"The Priests and Elders of the three great Sects are not dead!" he said suddenly, just as the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Upright Evening Sect approached with hand raised.

As soon as the words left his mouth, the old man's eyes gleamed. The face of the man from the Cold Wind Sect also flickered.

"They're trapped inside Patriarch Reliance's Immortal's Cave. It's right over there." He lifted his hand to point at the East Mountain.

The eyes of the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect flashed like lightning as he glanced up at the peak. The group of Qi Condensation Cultivators from the Upright Evening Sect also looked toward the East Mountain.

However, the Upright Evening Sect Foundation Establishment Cultivator smiled. It was a gruesome smile filled with ridicule.

"I'm interested to know how you are aware that the Priests and Elders

from the three great Sects are dead.” Hearing this, Meng Hao’s heart flip-flopped, although his expression did not change.

“It actually doesn’t matter what you say. Once I get ahold of you, you’ll answer all my questions.” He lifted his right hand and stretched it out towards Meng Hao. As he did, the power of his Foundation Establishment Cultivation base exploded out, and an enormous hand appeared in the air in front of him. It screamed through the air, heading directly toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao immediately began to dodge, but even as he did so, the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect flicked his sleeve and gave out a cold laugh. A fierce wind shot toward Meng Hao.

Both Foundation Establishment Cultivators attacked at the same time. Gritting his teeth, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding. A sheet of lightning appeared which coalesced into a Lightning Flag.

This flag was one of the objects he had taken from Patriarch Reliance, and it had the power to defend against attacks from Foundation Establishment Cultivators. As soon as it appeared, it grew, transforming into a sheet of mist, within which lightning roiled. The mist expanded out to cover Meng Hao.

An explosion rolled out. Inside the mist, Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood, and his body was shoved backward. The eyes of the old Foundation Establishment Cultivator grew wide, and he stared in shock at the mist.

The man from the Cold Wind Sect gasped loudly.

The mist surrounding Meng Hao was about five or six meters in diameter. Meng Hao’s face was pale and his mouth was smeared with blood. His internal organs ached and bled, and only by extorting a huge amount of effort was he able to keep them under control. To employ the full power of the flag would require significant refinement, and Meng Hao hadn’t had very much time to practice with it. As such, he could only utilize half of its power. It rotated around him unstably.

“This is an excellent treasure,” said the old man from the Upright

Evening Sect. "Too bad you can't use it correctly. Let's see how much of my magic you can withstand!" He moved forward, raising his hand again. A field of black dust spread out in front of him. It glittered as it transformed into a multitude of black threads, which then flew toward the mist.

A boom rang out, and then the old man himself neared the mist. Every time he waved his hand back and forth, the black dust threads smashed into the mist, causing booms to ring out.

With a cold smile, the Cold Wind Sect Cultivator flashed an incantation sign. His hand instantly transformed into ice, which then shattered and reformed in front of him into a larger hand. The icy hand shot toward Meng Hao.

In the blink of an eye, it reached him. Thunderous roars filled the air as the black threads and the icy hand caused the mist surrounding Meng Hao to slowly contract. Inside, blood sprayed from Meng Hao's mouth, and his body felt as if it were about to be torn to pieces. His mind was in a jumble, and his face as pale as death. A feeling of life-and-death peril enveloped him; the thread connecting him to the Lightning Flag could be severed at any moment.

When that happened, it wouldn't matter that Meng Hao's Cultivation base had completed the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. That was still the Qi Condensation stage, and he was facing the Foundation Establishment stage. The gap between the two was too vast.

At this critical juncture, Meng Hao, his eyes bloodshot, suddenly slapped his bag of holding. In his hand appeared an oil lamp, from within which emitted an ancient Qi.

The wick of this lamp was a Nascent Soul, sitting cross-legged in meditation. It was none other than... Lord Revelation!

The Nascent Soul was the fuel, and life force was the fire. The blazing flame cast light onto Meng Hao's face. A ferocious expression filled his face, and his eyes shined with killing intent. He had thought of the only possible way to get out of this situation.

He took a deep breath, and suddenly, popping sounds rang out from his body. His Cultivation base began to rotate with the power of the Great Circle of Qi Condensation. His Core Sea roiled and churned, and spiritual power raced through his Qi passageways. He poured the full power of his Cultivation base into a single mouthful of Qi.

He looked out past the mist.

Because the mist was covering him, no one could see the oil lamp in his hand. Furthermore, none of the Qi from the lamp emanated outwards.

Bangs rang out as the mist continued to contract. Currently, it only stretched out about one meter. More black dust appeared in the hand of the old Foundation Establishment Cultivator.

“Open up!” he roared, waving his hand toward the mist. Instantly, an explosion could be heard as the mist shattered and dispersed, reforming into the Lightning Flag, which flew back to Meng Hao.

“If I say today is the day you die, then you will die!” The old man waved his hand again, and the black dust descended toward Meng Hao.

It was then that the old man noticed the oil lamp in the hands of pale-faced Meng Hao. His expression suddenly changed.

“Is that...?”

Meng Hao’s killing intent soared. Without giving his opponent even the chance to think, he opened his lips and spit out the mouthful of Qi.

The Qi passed through the flame of the oil lamp. As it did, it expanded out into a massive conflagration. The old Foundation Establishment cultivator retreated, shocked. But the expanding flames were too fast, and reached him in an instant.

Miserable screams filled the air as fire consumed him. The black dust in his hand had already been vaporized. Within seconds, his clothing, and then his flesh, and been reduced to ash.

Everything happened too quickly. The surrounding Cultivators didn’t even have time to react. By the time the blood-curdling screams began to

ring out, the old Cultivator had already been burned into nothingness. Nothing remained, not even his bag of holding.

Meng Hao's face was pale, and his hands trembled. The Qi he had just shot out contained all the power of his Cultivation base, as well as the fearsome might of the oil lamp's flame.

Everything was as silent as death... Wisps of twisting demonic flame still floated about in the spot where the Foundation Establishment Cultivator had been incinerated.

The sounds of his screams still echoed in the air. The nine or so remaining Cultivators from the Upright Evening Sect looked on with expressions of disbelief.

"Elder Zhang just...."

"What... what was that fire?"

"This is impossible.... Elder Zhang is a Foundation Establishment Cultivator. How could he possibly die under Meng Hao's hand...."

They didn't dare to believe. A mighty Foundation Establishment expert, unexpectedly... burned to death by a flame cast by a Qi Condensation Cultivator. In their minds, this was an impossibility. Foundation Establishment Cultivators simply could not be killed by Qi Condensation Cultivators.

Even a weak Foundation Establishment Cultivator shouldn't be able to die at the hand of a Qi Condensation Cultivator

What they had just witnessed set their minds spinning into chaos. They stared at Meng Hao in astonishment.

What they didn't know was that the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect was even more flabbergasted than they were. He stared at the place where the old Foundation Establishment Cultivator had just been, his eyes wide, his face pale, and his heart trembling. An indescribable fear gripped his heart.

As a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, he was in an elite position in

the State of Zhao, and rarely had anything to fear. Yet now, he was afraid. In fact, “afraid,” is probably not the appropriate word. He was petrified.

He looked at the oil lamp in Meng Hao’s hand, his mind reeling. The terror in his heart grew stronger. He didn’t know what fire this Qi Condensation disciple had wielded, but he had an inkling.

“That must have been Nascent Soul fire. That’s a Nascent Soul. That fire was kindled with life force to form Nascent Soul fire! It can burn to death, not only Foundation Establishment Cultivators, but also Core Formation stage Cultivators!” His breathing agitated, he stared at Meng Hao. His scalp grew numb, and he subconsciously retreated a few paces. He did not dare to get any closer. At the moment, he had forgotten completely about his prestigious Foundation Establishment status.

Meng Hao stood there on his flying sword, the lamp in his hand. He made a beckoning motion with his left hand, and the Lightning Flag flew back into his bag of holding. He circulated his Cultivation base, staring coldly at the Cold Wind Sect Cultivator.

It was at this moment, however, that three blurs of light appeared in the air above the Reliance Sect, each one over ten meters wide. Ripples spread out from them as they shot mightily toward Meng Hao and the others.

Within the three beams were three old men who looked as if they had just climbed out of the grave. Their faces were covered with wrinkles, and strong Death Qi emanated from their bodies. And yet, along with the Death Qi that circled about them was the Qi of their Condensation bases. This Qi was eminently powerful. It was not quite of the Nascent Soul stage, but they had definitely completed the Great Circle of Core Formation.

Meng Hao’s heart sank, and he clasped his oil lamp tightly. He had just expended roughly eighty to ninety percent of his Cultivation base. It had taken that much to create the terrifying fire he had just utilized.

Their speed was incredible as they approached. A relieved expression appeared in the eye of the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect. And yet, at that very moment, a Qi appeared which

surpassed that of the False Nascent Soul stage Patriarchs. In an instant, the Qi enveloped the entire State of Zhao.

An enormous bell appeared above the Reliance Sect, and a grim voice filled the air.

“Patriarch Reliance, get the hell out and face me!”

The voice crackled like lightning, its power filling the sky. Its might billowed out, shattering the flying snow shield. As for the nine or so Qi Condensation disciples from the Upright Evening Sect, blood fountained out of their mouths, and then one by one, they exploded, unable to withstand the power.

Meng Hao’s body shook, and he spit out blood. He looked up into the sky, his eyes narrowing.

The face of the Cold Wind Sect’s Foundation Establishment Cultivator twisted, and the approaching Patriarchs from the three great Sects looked amazed. They stopped flying and immediately clasped hands and bowed toward an old man in a black robe who stood next to the bell in the sky.

His robes whipped about in the wind. Behind him, the clouds spun violently. The pupil of his left eye looked like the sun, and shone with brilliant light. The right eye was dark, and its pupil looked like a crescent moon. Between his eyebrows was a strange looking slit, within which appeared to be another eye. This eye itself was invisible, but emitted a bloody glow.

It was Lord Revelation!

Chapter 93: Sever the Dao, Change Heaven and Earth, Demonic Will!

The instant he saw Lord Revelation, Meng Hao's body grew stiff. In his hands, the Nascent Soul of Lord Revelation's clone burned in the demonic lamp.

Lord Revelation's shout shook the earth for millions of kilometers in all directions. Mountains trembled and the sky filled with dark, roiling clouds.

Meng Hao's heart quivered and blood seeped out of his mouth. His body was pushed backwards relentlessly. He coughed up an entire mouthful of blood.

Everyone in the region of the Reliance Sect, including the False Nascent Soul Patriarchs and the Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect, were as frightened as cicadas in cold weather. They didn't dare to make even the slightest sound. They stared up into the sky, astonished, their eyes filled with dread.

And yet, despite the quaking of the earth, the area around Patriarch Reliance's secluded meditation zone was completely quiet. Not a sound could be heard from Patriarch Reliance.

Lord Revelation hovered in the air next to his bell. His eyes shone with the splendor of the sun and moon. The darkness and light seemed to interlock and then combine with the crimson bloody glow which emanated from the slit between his eyebrows. He lifted his right hand up, and then waved it downward.

As he did, the dark glow, the bright light and the bloody essence combined to form the image of a hand. It began to descend toward the earth.

It takes some time to describe, but happened in an instant. A roar filled the air as the hand fell downward toward the East Mountain of the Reliance Sect. As the hand descended onto the East Mountain, it began to crumble, layer after layer crashing down and disintegrating into dust. By

the time the hand had finished its descent, the East Mountain... was gone!

The earth shook, and a fierce wind kicked up. After destroying the East Mountain, the hand didn't stop. It continued to pierce down into the ground, as if Lord Revelation knew exactly where Patriarch Reliance's secluded meditation chamber was located.

A boom resonated outward, filling nearly half of the State of Zhao. The earth rippled outwards. It seemed that the hand had pierced down and actually destroyed Patriarch Reliance's secluded meditation zone!

After the hand finally disappeared, the onlookers saw a massive hole. Within it were numerous incomplete restrictive spells. The place... really was Patriarch Reliance's secluded meditation zone. Stone steles and altars lay about in ruins. The massive image of Patriarch Reliance's face was shattered into pieces, and the secluded meditation chamber had been knocked open.

But... Patriarch Reliance was nowhere to be seen!

"Patriarch Reliance, get the hell out here!" When Lord Revelation saw that Patriarch Reliance was not in the meditation chamber, he raised his head to the sky and let out a roar.

The roar vibrated the heavens, rippling outward until it filled the entire State of Zhao.

"You get the hell out here!"

"Get the hell out here!"

"Get the hell out..."

"Get the hell..." Innumerable echoes could be heard, swirling together to form a mighty sound of incomprehensible might.

Meng Hao's body trembled as he looked out at the scene. In the place where the East Mountain had once stood, was a giant hole. Patriarch Reliance had been there just a few hours ago, but now he wasn't.

"Where is he..." thought Meng Hao, his face growing pale. At the moment, he literally couldn't move. The power of Lord Revelation's voice

suppressed everything. Anyone whose Cultivation base was lower than Lord Revelations could do nothing more than struggle to stand up against it.

The power seemed to contain elements of the Heavens, as if Lord Revelation's will controlled everything.

"This is not Nascent Soul stage, this is Spirit Severing stage!!"

"It's definitely Spirit Severing, otherwise this will could not be present!" The three False Nascent Core Patriarchs of the three great Sects appeared even more shocked.

"Patriarch Reliance, you won't show your face? I'll destroy your only Inner Sect disciple and wipe out the bloodline of your Sect forever! I'll level all of these mountains and melt the entire State of Zhao until you appear!" He had already swept the State of Zhao with his Spiritual Sense, but no matter how he searched, he couldn't find Patriarch Reliance.

And yet on his way here, he had clearly divined that Patriarch Reliance... was within the State of Zhao.

A cold look glowed in Lord Revelation's eyes. This was his true self, here to battle with Patriarch Reliance. And yet, Patriarch Reliance was hiding. Powerful killing intent emanated from Lord Revelation. There was a wealth of methods he could use to force Patriarch Reliance to show himself, including killing his Inner Sect disciple and levelling the mountains. If exterminating the State of Zhao didn't draw him out, he could literally melt the entire country.

Lord Revelation had long since caught sight of the oil lamp in Meng Hao's hands. He looked down, his gaze sweeping the land once again. He lifted his hand, then waved it downward a second time.

This time light poured from his eyes, and the slit on his forehead opened up to the width of a finger. The blood red light poured out, and as his hand descended, the mountains for tens of thousands of miles in all directions began to rock and sway. In the sky above the quaking mountains, appeared... an enormous hand!

At first it didn't seem very large, but amidst thunderous rumblings, it grew larger and larger, until it seemed as if it covered the mountains for tens of thousands of kilometres in all directions. The earth trembled, and the faces of the three False Nascent Soul Patriarchs were filled with shock. They fled at the fastest speed they could muster.

The Foundation Establishment Cultivator from the Cold Wind Sect looked pale. He bit the tip of his tongue, sacrificing some of his Cultivation base as he transforming into a prismatic beam of light and fled off into the distance.

As for Meng Hao, his Cultivation base was the weakest. He couldn't even move. The oil lamp flew out of his hands, racing toward the giant palm. The cross-legged Nascent Soul inside opened its eyes, and then radiated a glow similar to that emitted by Lord Revelation.

Meng Hao could only watch wide-eyed as the hand in the sky grew bigger and bigger. It covered everything, until it was the only thing visible in the entire sky.

Everything for ten thousand kilometers grew black. The hand covered everything. And then, it began to descend. The earth began to quake. Mountains buckled and collapsed. As the hand fell toward him, Meng Hao felt as if doomsday had arrived.

A bitter look appeared on his face as he stood there silently. There was no fear or dread in his eyes. He let out a soft sigh.

"Is everything going to end? I just... I can't accept it." Stubbornness filled his eyes, a flicker which turned into a roaring flame.

"In the Cultivation world, the weak are the prey of the strong. The Cultivation base is everything. Only by becoming powerful can you continue on living. Only by increasing your strength can you prevent yourself from being crushed beneath the feet of others. Only then can you stand high in the sky." Meng Hao suddenly smiled. His smile was filled with deep understanding. His will carried the deep desire to become powerful. Now, in the face of such imminent danger, he truly understood himself.

“The sages said, learning is the most important thing in the life. But in the Cultivation world, only the powerful can remain undefeated!” Meng Hao stared up at the descending hand. He would watch as it landed onto his body, crushing him into the ground. He would not close his eyes. He would watch everything. He would imprint this vision onto his spirit. When he was reincarnated, it would still be there. If there really was a next life... he would become powerful and invincible then!

As the hand continued to plummet, the mountains around him crumbled. Everything started to grow blurry, and blackness filled Meng Hao's eyes. It was as if at this moment, heaven and earth viewed him as nothing more than a bug. He didn't struggle in the least bit.

“If there is an afterlife, I will never allow something like this to happen again!”

Amidst the deafening roaring, Meng Hao stood there, trembling. Blood seeped out of his orifices, and his bones made cracking sounds. Within moments, he would be reduced to nothing more than a pool of blood.

It was at this moment that, all of a sudden, a dark red light appeared. Glowing brightly, it shot toward the hand at high speed, speeding out from a location far away from Meng Hao's vision.

The blood-red glow seemed to be formed from the dregs of blood refined over innumerable years. A powerful Demonic Qi poured out, filling the heavens.

The Demonic Qi was so thick that it seemed to be able to change the color of heaven and earth. In the blink of an eye, everything turned the color of blood!

The bloody glow approached, speeding toward the massive hand that Lord Revelation had summoned. And then it severed it!

The severing sent a bloody glow high into the Heavens!

This severing was powerful enough to rend all creation.

This severing seemed strong enough to split heaven and earth into two. And even if it wasn't actually that powerful, it had the will to attempt to!

Sever the Dao, change heaven and earth, Demonic will!

This person... was not Patriarch Reliance!

Chapter 94: You Really Want Me To Come Out?

An incredible roaring boom sounded out from the massive hand as the glowing red beam sliced through it. Starting in the space between the middle and ring finger of the hand, a massive gash appeared, cutting it completely in half.

One slash, and the hand was severed.

“You!!!” cried Lord Revelation. His face flickered, and he lifted his head, his eyes flashing.

A thunderous boom rolled across the land. The giant hand, ten thousand kilometers wide, had moments ago blotted out Meng Hao’s vision, covering the entire land. But in the blink of an eye, a gap appeared, and Meng Hao could suddenly see the sky.

The hand split apart into two halves, each of which slammed into the ground on either side of Meng Hao.

The ground trembled and began to sink down. The mountains were crushed. All the wild creatures in the area, unable to flee, were instantly transformed to ash.

The Cold Wind Sect Foundation Establishment Cultivator, despite having spared no effort in his attempt to flee, could not possibly escape in such a short time. He was smashed to death into the ground.

The Cultivation bases of the three False Nascent Soul Patriarchs were anything but ordinary. Furthermore, Lord Revelation was not targeting them with his attack. They also sacrificed elements of their Cultivation bases to flee. Coughing up seven or eight mouthfuls of blood each, they just managed to reach the edge of the giant hand. Behind them, the earth seemed to have turned into a violently churning sea. As the hand disappeared, they mutely looked back at the scene.

Previously, the Reliance Sect had been surrounded by endless mountain chains. As of now, the only thing that remained was a massive recess in

the ground. Its shape was that of a giant hand.

However, the handprint was not complete. Splitting it down the middle was a jagged section of earth jutting up into the sky like a mountain!

On top of the mountain stood Meng Hao. Beneath him was a stretch of earth about one hundred meters wide. It created a jagged path, on either side of which was a massive hole that sunk down deep into the earth.

Originally, this mountain should not have been here, but there it was ... the only thing left.

A strange expression filled Meng Hao's eyes as he looked up into the sky. He didn't know who had saved him, and he didn't stop to think about it. Immediately, a flying sword appeared under his feet, and he sped off into the distance, his body turning into a multicolored beam of light as he shot toward the edge of the massive handprint.

"I never thought the illustrious Demon Lord of the Southern Domain would show up in the tiny State of Zhao." Lord Revelation's face was dark as he flicked his sleeve. His voice echoed out like thunder in all directions. "But you're only a clone! Your true self is suppressed and incapable of coming here to stop me from exterminating Patriarch Reliance!"

There was no response. It was almost as if the blood-red severing glow hadn't appeared at all.

"Patriarch Reliance, get the hell out here!"

"Get the hell out here!"

"Get the hell out here!!" As his voice boomed out, Lord Revelation lifted his right hand and slapped the Revelation Bell. Its booming filled the sky, echoing out across the land, sweeping Lord Revelation's voice along with it.

Countless tall mountains throughout the State of Zhao began to crack and crumble as a voice filled with profound ancientness filled the air. It was impossible to tell where the voice came from, but it filled the entire country.

“You... really want me to come out?” As soon as he heard the voice, Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. It was Patriarch Reliance’s voice. And yet, something about it sounded different. It seemed less unreasonable and more dignified. More ancient.

“So, you finally speak,” said Lord Revelation, his eyes glittering. “Patriarch Reliance, quit hiding. We have a score to settle from a thousand years ago. Even if you succeeded in your Spirit Severing, you should not have dared to take my clone’s Nascent Soul! Today, we battle, and in the end, I will remain, and you will not!” He flicked the Revelation Bell, and it sounded out with a boom and began to emit a blinding light. The light enveloped Lord Revelation, and he began to glow brightly.

As for this battle, it must be won. He had already determined Patriarch Reliance’s true level. Lord Revelation had already completed the Second Spirit Severing, and with that power, he could exterminate Patriarch Reliance.

As for this battle, he had complete confidence. He had thrown caution to the wind and come here as his true self. A Demon Lord had appeared and used a bit of remarkable magic, but that didn’t scare him in the least.

As for this battle, there was not the slightest chance he could lose. He had brought the Revelation Bell, which had absorbed countless prayers and sacrifices from the State of Revelation. It was sentient already, his most valuable treasure. With this bell, even if he faced someone of the Third Severing, he would still be able to achieve victory. In addition to this, Immortal Li had gifted him with a portion of his Spiritual Sense.

Everything was quiet for a long moment. Then, Patriarch Reliance’s voice could be heard again, filled with profound ancientness.

“Back then... I only cared about the Milky Way Sea.” The voice was filled with a strange tone. It echoed out, seemingly filled with the ability to last through the ages. It echoed out across the entirety of the State of Zhao. The land began to quake.

This quaking filled the entire State of Zhao. Even the mortals could feel it. Meng Hao ducked his head and shot forward even faster.

“I don’t know how many years passed, nor how many times I slumbered and awoke. Finally, a day arrived in which I woke up to find myself facing a through and through bastard who should have died a thousand, no, ten thousand deaths!” From his tone of voice, he seemed to be getting upset. The last few words were spoken as if through clenched teeth.

As he spoke, the trembling across the State of Zhao grew more intense. Mountains and boulders trembled, tall buildings rocked back and forth. Within the three Great Sects, the remaining Cultivators looked around in shock.

The situation was the same in Milky Way City.

Meng Hao’s mind spun. He was wondering which bastard Patriarch Reliance was referring to.

“That damned bastard couldn’t possibly defeat me. He brought a bunch of other bastards with him, and we fought back and forth for years. In the end, they deceived me. They made a lot of promises to me, convinced me to leave the Milky Way Sea and come to the Southern Domain....” Patriarch Reliance seemed to be growing angrier and angrier. As he spoke, the land of the State of Zhao shook even harder. In the northern part of the country, a thunderous roar sounded up into the heavens. A massive crack appeared in the land, millions of miles long, and growing longer!

If you could stand far up in the sky and look down, you would be able to see that this massive crack was not a straight line, but a curving arc.

“When I got to the Southern Domain, the bastards tricked me. They fed me a bunch of random things that ended up placing me underneath an invisible seal!! They promised me that a few years later, they would give me some kind of special blessing of luck. But later, the damned bastards all died or disappeared. Finally, there was only the original one left. When I was asleep, he sneaked off to another star. He left me with a Demon Sealing Jade, which I was supposed to give to a successor. In reality, those bastards were just afraid of Heavenly tribulation, and wanted to use me to fight against it!” Patriarch Reliance seemed to be gnashing his teeth. The sound reverberated across the land. A huge crack appeared in the eastern

region of the State of Zhao, accompanied by a thunderous roar. The shape of the crack was a massive semi-circle.

Seeing all of this happen, Lord Revelation's face changed. He appeared to be growing a bit apprehensive.

Meng Hao took in a breath, thinking of the Demon Sealing Jade that he had.

"The bastards didn't keep their promise. They tricked me! I was enraged, and even though I slumbered, I still managed to squeeze out a bit of Spiritual will. It was weak, and constrained by the laws of the Dao of the Heavens, so it was incarnated into the body of a mortal. It started from scratch, practicing Cultivation. Because they tricked me, I decided to sever their legacy! I changed the name of the Demon Sealing Sect to the Reliance Sect. From then on, my Spiritual will called itself Patriarch Reliance!" As his voice boomed out, Meng Hao's eyes suddenly grew wide. He looked back at the land of the State of Zhao behind him. It seethed like an ocean, under the echoes of Patriarch Reliance's words.

When Lord Revelation heard the words, his expression changed to one of shock. Without even thinking about it, he began to move backwards. Another crashing boom rolled out across the State of Zhao, and a massive crack appeared in the south. At the same time, in the east, a fourth arcing crack appeared, accompanied by a thunderous bang. The four massive cracks split out to meet each other, surrounding the entire State of Zhao in a massive circle.

The entirety of the State of Zhao was contained in this enormous circle which suddenly... began to rise into the air. Black soil was revealed, and a fierce gale wind blew in all directions. Massive amounts of soil crumbled off the edges.

As it rose up, the land quaked and clouds roiled in the sky. Lord Revelation's face was pale, his eyes filled with shock.

The ground rumbled as it rose higher and higher into the air. One thousand meters, five thousand, ten thousand. It rose so high that it was impossible to describe.

The land rose up, and Meng Hao was still on it. He felt as if he were approaching heaven.

The land contained the cities of the mortals, the three great Sects, Milky Way city, and countless lives!

The entire State of Zhao was being lifted up, rising away from the earth, away from the Southern Domain. Beneath it was a massive, enormous hole in the ground!

The hole was, of course, the same size as the entire State of Zhao!

Standing above the hole was a vicious-looking turtle, as large as the entire State of Zhao, its body covered with countless black spikes!! It looked just like the mythical Xuan Wu black turtle!!

Earth covered the turtle's massive shell, as if the shell were being held in place by the land. The earth was none other than... the State of Zhao.

A colossal head slowly emerged from the turtle's shell. The head was roughly one tenth the size of the entire State of Zhao. Its skin was black, and covered with creases. Earth crumbled off from the head as it raised up. Its massive eyes turned to look down on Lord Revelation who stood there panting, as tiny as an insect, his face pale, his body quivering, a look of disbelief on his face.

"You called me out. Shall we fight?"

Chapter 95: A Rain Shower, a Cold Spell

Meng Hao stared dumbly, his mind reeling. All the fantastic and bizarre things he had seen in his life couldn't compare to the shocking sight in front of him. His mind was blank, as if he had lost his ability to even think. He could only stand there and look numbly.

Patriarch Reliance was actually... a mind-bogglingly enormous black turtle!

And the State of Zhao existed on the earth upon his back!!

He himself had lived on Patriarch Reliance's back for these twenty years. No wonder he was called Patriarch Reliance. He was relied upon not just by a single person, but by an entire country! Cultivators and mortals alike relied on him!

After Patriarch Reliance had been sealed, he began to slumber. Yet he still managed to force out a tiny bit of his will, which then attempted to destroy the legacy of the Demon Sealing Sect.

Now it made sense why the Reliance Sect had formerly been called the Demon Sealing Sect, although few people even knew that nowadays. And no wonder the Reliance Sect was called an evil Sect and had such brutal, internecine struggles.

The body containing the sliver of his will practiced Cultivation until reaching the Spirit Severing stage, but as for his actual body... how powerful was it, exactly?!

There were still many things Meng Hao didn't understand. For example, if Patriarch Reliance was so powerful, why hadn't he been able to save himself from the very beginning? If Meng Hao hadn't appeared, would he have died? Considering how powerful his actual body was, why did he need to absorb the power of those Cultivators?

Lifted up along with the land containing the State of Zhao, the three False Nascent Soul Cultivators stared in shock as all of this happened. Their minds spun and expressions of astonishment covered their faces.

They were even incapable of feeling fear. They could only stare blankly. They could scarcely even believe what they saw.

Lord Revelation was also struck speechless as he looked up at the massive head. It was immeasurably larger than he himself; in fact, it was so large that you couldn't even see from one end of it to another. Fear began to shine out from his eyes; how could he possibly have imagined that the Patriarch Reliance he had cursed and challenged to fight... would be like this?

As Patriarch Reliance's voice echoed out, his words stabbed into Lord Revelation's ears, causing his body to tremble and his scalp to go numb. He was sapped of any and all will to fight.

Patriarch Reliance didn't need to strike out. Now that he had truly appeared, he casually exuded a bit of pressure onto Lord Revelation, causing his body to tremble. Lord Revelation's blood seemed as if it would stop flowing. The Dao enlightenment he had acquired with his Spirit Severing collapsed. He was as weak as a bug. Patriarch Reliance could crush him with a single breath.

The terrifying pressure exuded by the head caused Lord Revelation's mouth to go dry. Despite his extraordinary Cultivation base, cold sweat broke out across his body. The Revelation Bell next to him didn't give him the slightest sense of comfort. Even the Spiritual Sense imparted by Immortal Li didn't give him the slightest sense of safety.

Now he understood why Patriarch Reliance hadn't paid the slightest bit attention when he mentioned Immortal Li. Of course he wouldn't, considering his extraordinary actual body.

And now he knew why Patriarch Reliance didn't fear Immortal Li....

Even more astonishing was that in his recollection, according to all of the ancient texts he had studied, the State of Zhao had existed for a very, very long time. This made him even more frightened. Which had existed first.... Patriarch Reliance, or the State of Zhao?!

If it were the latter, that would be easier to accept. If it were the former... Thinking of this, Lord Revelation began to tremble so violently he felt as if

his skin might explode.

“Well, shall we fight?” The words echoed out Patriarch Reliance, each one of them rumbling like thunder. The thunderous booming caused Lord Revelation to be hurled backward several thousand meters. Blood showered from his mouth. The bell seemed completely ordinary now; it was covered with vast amounts of cracks and fractures.

“No... there’s no need to fight,” said Lord Revelation hastily, his face pale. “Just now, I of the junior generation was simply joking. Patriarch... Sir... please don’t take offence....” Patriarch Reliance’s two enormous eyes stared directly at him, and he trembled.

“Without your two palm strikes, I wouldn’t have been able to come out. Those damned bastards sealed me many years ago; the seal has been growing weaker recently. But to break through it, I needed to recover my Cultivation base a bit more. But then in the midst of it all, someone released the power of the Spirit Severing stage. That knocked the seal even looser, and finally I was able to break out!” His voice boomed out in all directions. When Meng Hao heard the words, his body trembled.

“Originally, I planned to use my sliver of will to break the seal. But mortal Cultivation and I don’t quite agree. Even with my knowledge of the Sublime Spirit Scripture, I couldn’t break through to the next level of Spirit Severing. Just when I was about to make the final breakthrough, I got cheated by a hateful little bastard. Dammit, everyone from the Demon Sealing Sect is a bastard! Stealing the spiritual energy I needed to break the seal, robbing me of my demonic lamp....” He let out a roar. Meng Hao wanted to flee; he knew exactly who Patriarch Reliance was talking about.

“You did well, very well. Luckily you attacked, helping break my seal. I need to repay you.”

Hearing Patriarch Reliance’s words, Lord Revelation gaped in shock. Then his expression changed to one of wild joy. How could he have imagined that he would score a lucky break? He had gotten lucky after all! Even as he clasped his hands in respect, Patriarch Reliance opened his mouth, and with blinding speed, snapped him up.

Lord Revelation and his Revelation Bell were swallowed down in an instant!

Crunching sounds emanated from Patriarch Reliance's mouth, but no blood-curdling scream. When Meng Hao saw this, he began to breathe harder. He was all too familiar with Patriarch Reliance's unreasonableness. He unconsciously retreated backward. Suddenly, Patriarch Reliance's head swung around to face Meng Hao. It came to stop a few hundred meters in front of him, staring at him.

Meng Hao squeezed out a smile. He didn't necessarily believe everything that Patriarch Reliance had said to Lord Revelation, but neither did he disbelieve. From his experience, most of what the Patriarch said wasn't true.

"Congratulations on emerging from seclusion, Patriarch. Your might is all-encompassing. You..."

"Now that you know the truth, are you frightened?" Patriarch Reliance's voice rolled out like thunder, and he glared at Meng Hao. The sound of his voice was so loud it was almost deafening. He coughed up some blood.

"You Demon Sealing Sect people are all bastards," said Patriarch Reliance slowly, staring at Meng Hao. "Those old bastards were like this, and you're the same, kid. You all cheated me. Oh well, forget it. You're a member of the Reliance Sect, after all. Allow me to bless you with..." As Patriarch Reliance spoke, Meng Hao's scalp began to grow numb. He thought of what had just happened with Lord Revelation, and his mind began to race as he tried to think of what to do.

Suddenly, a spark of inspiration hit him as he remembered something.

He remembered what the young girl Guyiding Tri-rain had said to him at the North Sea.

"Big Brother, its Qi ... is beneath your feet. Don't provoke it. Remember... the great path of Demon Sealing, a concept like a scripture."

At that time, Meng Hao hadn't understood her words, but all of a sudden, now he did. The "it" beneath his feet... was none other than

Patriarch Reliance!

Don't provoke it. Remember... the great path of Demon Sealing, a concept like a scripture.

"The great path of Demon Sealing, a concept like a scripture. Don't provoke it...." Meng Hao's mind flashed like lightning. Even as this happened, Patriarch Reliance finished speaking.

"...bless you with some luck. I need to repay you!"

The instant he finished speaking, Meng Hao lifted his hand and slapped his bag of holding. Instantly, the Demon Sealing Jade appeared in his hand.

When it appeared, a strong wind buffeted his face. The wind faded, and when it did, Patriarch Reliance's head was less than three meters away from him.

The ends of the colossal head couldn't even be seen. The only thing Meng Hao could see was black skin and a massive eye the size of a huge city.

The eye seemed to be struggling.

"An ancient path," said Meng Hao hurriedly, reciting the first line from the Demon Sealing Jade. "Persist in attempting to seal the Heavens; the Mountain Sea Realm, the vast Heavens, great benevolence; great tribulation shall be faced in the Ninth Mountain and the Ninth Sea, my life shall last an eternity!"

As the words left Meng Hao's mouth, Patriarch Reliance lifted his colossal head up and let out a massive roar. As it billowed out, ripples appeared in the air to accompany it. A nine-sided mystical symbol suddenly appeared on Patriarch Reliance's forehead. It appeared to be ancient and archaic, and deeply imbedded into his forehead. It flickered, and his body shook.

"Stop! Damned Demon Sealing Scripture and damned Demon Sealing Sect!!" A ferocious expression appeared on his face and he let out another heaven-shaking roar, then stared at Meng Hao. Meng Hao's heart

pounded as he looked back at Patriarch Reliance.

“Those bastards were too malignant. The seal is broken, but the sealing mark is still branded onto my spirit, forcing me to be the Dao protector of the ninth Demon Sealer. This cannot be! The Demon Sealing Sect has committed crimes against the Heavens, and was plagued by misfortune. They understood that the number nine is a preeminent, sacred number according to the Dao of the Heavens. They knew that the greatest opposition from the Heavens would come upon the ninth Demon Sealer. Therefore, they took precautions. They wanted me to be the Dao protector for the ninth Demon Sealer. But this trifling kid is of the Qi Condensation stage! How could he possibly act as my master? Those damned bastards! I changed the name from Demon Sealing Sect to Reliance Sect and created rules to pit all the disciples against each other, all in the hopes of preventing someone like Meng Hao from appearing!” Patriarch Reliance seemed to be thinking.

A mist began to seep out from the North Sea, which of course was part of the lands of the State of Zhao that rested on Patriarch Reliance’s back. Within the mist, a boat magically appeared. An old man and a young girl stood at the prow of the boat, looking up at Patriarch Reliance. They clasped hands and bowed to him with utmost respect.

“Guyiding Tri-rain pays respects to Patriarch,” said the young girl. Her voice, clear and melodious, echoed out with a light and spiritual tone.

“Ah, you’re the sentient rain that fell in the third month of the Yiding year of the ancient Gu calendar. You fell onto my back... and became a lake.”

The young girl smiled and nodded. Then she looked toward Meng Hao and winked.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. Now he finally understood the meaning of the girl’s strange name.

Patriarch Reliance let out a cold snort. He looked at the little girl and then stared off into the sky. Meng Hao followed his gaze and caught sight of what appeared to be an indistinct blood-colored figure.

The figure clasped hands and bowed in respect to Patriarch Reliance, then disappeared.

Patriarch Reliance lowered his head once more and looked at Meng Hao. "Very well, Meng Hao. In the future, keep your distance from me!" He blew a breath out of his mouth, causing Meng Hao to fly up into the air. Buffeted by a glowing black wind, Meng Hao was tossed out of the State of Zhao to land on the edge of the massive hole in the earth.

"Son of a bitch! I can't even look at him. In my life, I'll never recognize him as my master. I'm out of here. The further away the better. He'll never find me. As for the treasures of mine that he took, fine, consider them payment. All of our debts are settled. In this way, my heart can rest at ease and I can continue to practice Cultivation." His eyes flickered, and then his body turned. Meng Hao watched as the colossal turtle, carrying the State of Zhao on his back, transformed into a massive beam of prismatic light... and then disappeared over the horizon.

He appeared to be heading in the direction of the Milky Way Sea. Perhaps this was why legends arose of an island of Immortals. If one searched for it, it could never be found. But when it appeared, anyone who stepped foot on it would find that it was a country inhabited by mortals.

It was, of course, the State of Zhao.

Some time passed, and eventually the skies grew calm once again. Meng Hao stood there looking down at the deep, gaping hole. Then he looked off silently in the direction in which Patriarch Reliance had disappeared.

Time passed, and rain began to fall. It fell with urgency, slowly flowing down into the massive pit left by the State of Zhao. Many years later, this area would turn into a sea.

Standing amidst the sheets of falling rain, Meng Hao let out a long sigh. Images from the past several days flashed through his mind. It all seemed virtually inconceivable. Thinking upon it all, it seemed a dream-like fantasy.

The State of Zhao was gone.... Meng Hao looked around at the rain, then up into the hazy sky. He contemplated his life during the past four years.

“I started out as a scholar...” he murmured. “My life is like snow. I can only exist in winter. I can yearn for the summer of the mortal world, but that is not my life anymore....” After a long time passed, he turned. Surrounded by the falling rain, he once again began to tread a road which led away from his roots.

He struck a lonely figure amidst the rain. Eventually, he seemed to merge into it. Even if a hot wind blew over him, it would do nothing to disperse him. Because this was his life.

Life is comprised of one experience after another. Or, you could say that life is comprised of many experiences. Different experiences lead to different lives; if you experience a cold bitter wind, you will become snow. If you experience scorching heat, you will become rain....

Whatever you experience in life will shape the person you are. That is what makes life wonderful.

“Southern Domain, here I come! Although, before I get there, I must establish my Foundation!” As he walked through the rain, he lifted up his head, and his eyes glittered brilliantly.

He would never forget the stubborn desire to achieve power that he had experienced underneath the descent of Lord Revelation’s palm attack. In this world, only the powerful can be invincible.

“Wait a minute, where did that blood-colored glow come from...?”

With questions circling in his mind, Meng Hao disappeared into the distance.

*

Popular speculation leads us to believe that the blood-red figure is the same person who appeared in Chapter 34

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